

6 12. 2. 6  
SERMONS

O N

Several Occasions,

I N

Three VOLUMES.

---

By the Late Reverend

NATHANAEL MARSHALL, D. D.

Canon of *Windsor*, and Chaplain in Ordinary  
to His MAJESTY.

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VOL. I. 3 Lf

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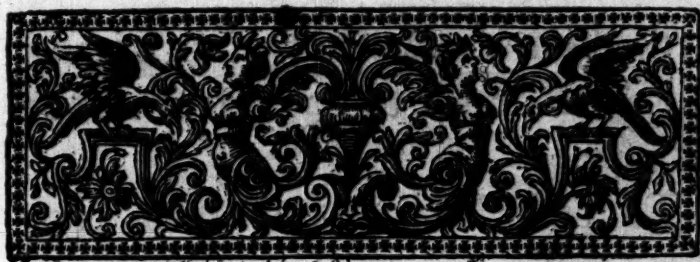
L O N D O N,

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M D C C X X X I.

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T O T H E  
Q U E E N.

M A D A M,



Humbly beg Leave to  
request Your Majesty's  
Patronage of these  
Sermons, encouraged  
thereto in some Mea-  
sure by that Goodness, which dis-  
poses Your Royal Heart to receive  
a dutiful Address even from the  
meanest of the King's Subjects;  
but chiefly by that favourable Re-  
gard

## DEDICATION.

gard which the Author when Living had the Honour to enjoy from Your Majesty.

That His Majesty may long continue to be a public Blessing, and to reign in the Hearts of a flourishing People; and that Your Majesty may long remain happy in the Affections of so great and good a Prince, and in the Veneration of all Wise, Learned and Deserving Men, are the daily Prayers of,

M A D A M,

*Your Majesty's*

*Most dutiful*

*and devoted Servant,*

MARGARET MARSHALL.





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THE



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OF THE  
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Thou hast granted me Life and Favour, and  
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*Who being in the Form of God, thought it not Robbery to be equal with God :*

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*And whosoever speaketh a Word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, neither in the World to come.*

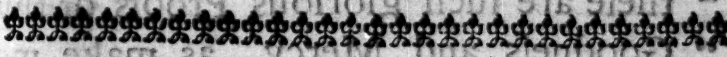
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S E R M O N

Preached before the Surgeon's  
Company.



J O B X. 11, 12.

*Thou hast clothed me with Skin and  
Flesh; and hast fenced me with  
Bones and Sinews.  
Thou hast granted me Life and Fa-  
vour; and thy Visitation hath  
preserved my Spirit.*



**I**N this, and the preceding  
Chapter Job expostulates with  
God upon the Subject of  
uncommon Calamities.

in the Text he pleads the Relation

in to his Maker, of a Creature made and fashion'd by his Wisdom, sustain'd by his Power, and govern'd by his Providence. Upon which in the Verse next following, he seems to build some Foundation of Hope and Comfort; *these Things* (says he) *hast thou hid in thine Heart; I know that this is with thee; "tho' at present thou seemest to hide "this, and to have forgot thy past "loving Kindness and Favour; yet "these are such glorious Proofs of thy "Goodness and Mercy, as make me "conclude I am not quite abandon'd; "but that thou still retainest some glorious Remembrance of me".*

I shall no longer detain you in pre-facing the Subject I design to treat of from these Words; but shall proceed immediately to the Consideration of what they suggest to us.

Which are these three Things.

I. They ascribe to God the creating forming us. *Thou hast clothed me (the Text) with Skin and Flesh; and encased me with Bones and Sinews.*

.I II. The

H. The Disposal and Government of such Events as concern us. *Thou hast granted me Life and Favour. Life*, with the Comforts of it, (and a very large Portion of its Comforts *Job* had enjoy'd in the former Part of his Life;) these he likewise ascribes to God, as the Donor.

III. The Continuance and Preservation of his Being. *Thy Visitation* (or, as the LXX seem better to have rendred it, *Ἰστοροποιή*, *thy Inspection*) *hath preserv'd my Spirit.*

Upon each of these in their Order I will discourse very briefly; as hoping they need no laborious Proof, tho' it may be fit upon this Occasion to point them out to your Remembrance; which when I have done, I shall next infer from them what may be suitable to the Principles themselves, and to the Occasion of your present Assembly.

I. The *first* Observation made upon the Text was this, that it ascribes to God the creating and forming us. And so, I persuade my self, will every intelligent



ligent Reader or Hearer of it, when he considers the marvellous Frame and Structure of an human Body. It were *endless* to go into the Detail of Particulars, where the whole is so truly wonderful, so abounding in all the Tokens of miraculous Wisdom ; and *needless* to entertain you with Observations which you are much more capable of making than my self. I would rather chuse to appeal to your Experience, than pretend to inform your Knowledge in a Subject whereof you are such proper Judges. For I cannot doubt your Concurrence with me in observing and admiring the Depth of the Design, the Artifice of the Contexture, the Correspondence of Means to Ends, the Symmetry of the general Parts, and the Beauty and Harmony of the whole Contrivance. The Lillies of the Field, and the meanest Vegetable which grows there will employ the Wits of the profoundest Enquirer to trace out the Philosophy of its Production, and the hidden Reasons of its Growth and Increase. The whole Store-house of Nature furnishes not a  
single

# S E R M O N I.

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single Grain so ignoble or so inconsiderable, but what will open an amazing Scene of Wisdom to any one who will duly and attentively consider it. Let him account (if he can) for the Coherence of its several Parts; or so much as conceive the boundless Variety and unimaginable Number of them. But if from the inanimate Parts of the Creation, we gradually ascend to the Creatures endow'd with Life and Self-Motion, here is a fresh and more astonishing Scene to surprize and entertain us: How in a Space so small, as to escape our Sense, and even our Imagination, there should be crowded together, without Confusion or Disorder, such numberless Instruments of Action, and such various Springs of Motion: How Creatures which apparently move not by any Design or Forecast of their own, yet move with all the Regularity to which Design or Forecast could direct them: How they proceed invariably in the Tract which is beaten for them, without any Change in their Measures, or Diversity in their Counsels: How every Species

of Beings is form'd with Organs suited to their respective Natures, and fitted out with all proper Means of Preservation and Increase. I would but point to these Things, and barely suggest the Hint, which you will easily improve upon with all due Advantage. Now if the inanimate Parts of the Creation so evidently speak the Wisdom of the Contriver, and if his handy Work be more conspicuous yet and more admirable in every Creature endow'd with Life; I am sure you will allow me to rise in the Argument, and to commend more abundantly the Art and Wisdom of *Man's* Formation. Could Chance be the Parent of such a beautiful Offspring; or the Builder of so august a Fabrick? Chance! which 'tis now well known cannot form a Fly, nor produce the Meanest of living Creatures! What Life is it may be hard to determine, or what it consists in; yet thus much we know of it, that it is derived from no casual or fickle Principles, but is uniform and univocal, and cannot be hatch'd but in a proper *Nidus*: So that it proceeds



ceeds by Rule and Model, and is ever under the Direction of the prime Artificer. And human Life has at least as much to be pleaded on behalf of its heavenly Extract, as any Life besides it. What are the Beauties and Ornaments, what the Uses and Elegancies, what the Curiosity and Wisdom observable in the Contrivance of an human Body, you best I say can judge of, who have such frequent Opportunities of observing them. But I may fairly presume them to be great and admirable, since they long since extorted from one well vers'd in the Subject \* an Hymn of Praise to *Galen.* their glorious Author. Could the Philosophy of all these Wonders be now unravell'd, and could the *present State* of Mankind be accounted for in the common Course of Generation; yet what would this be to the original Production! Whence did the first Parents of Mankind derive their Being! There are but three Things here, which are possibly supposable. Either the Succession has been infinite of one Man to another, and so there was no Beginning,

all History contradicts; and it contradicts itself; or Chance, which never yet was known to be the Parent of an uniform Production, gave our first Parents that Life, which they communicated to Posterity; or else there was a first superior Cause whence we ourselves, and all Things about us, derived our Existence. And this is an Account of Things, which gives due Glory to their Author, is consistent with it self, and braves the Mind in no further Perplexity. For the rest, they may patch up a wounded Conscience, but can never cure it. This Notion of a first, all-wise, all-powerful Cause, will find a Time to vent it self, tho' Art may hush, or Business or Pleasure for a Season interrupt it. If then, I say, the *present State* of Mankind were accountable for by natural Causes, yet still the Fountain-head would remain *Dignus vindice nodus*, and require infinite Wisdom to solve the Difficulty. But to you again I may safely (I trust) appeal, whether there be not in the *present State* of Mankind, a thousand Difficulties which you cannot account

count for, whether the longer you converse with the Wonders of Nature, you discover not more and more Reason to admire the Wisdom of its Author; whether upon the whole, you discern not in the Frame of an human Body, apparent Traces of the Hand which fashion'd it. Yet could you do that (which I am sure you will not pretend to) solve every Appearance of Life and Motion; there would still remain a thinking self-conscious Principle, which would prove too hard for the most subtle Penetration.

The Atheist is well aware of this Difficulty; and therefore is for cutting the Knot which he cannot untie. Should a Substance quite different from Body, be allowed for the Seat of Thought and Reflexion, his Cause would be lost upon this single Principle, and an undoubted Way be cut out for introducing a Father of Spirits. And therefore he strenuously contends for an Enlargement in the Powers of Matter, and for ascribing to it Sensation and Thought. But should this now be granted.



granted as merely possible to Matter, yet surely its Texture must be more curiously wrought; and the Contrivance of forming it more elaborate and more artful, proportionably to the Importance of the Work, and the Dignity of the Employment intended for it. For if *Life* be so difficultly accounted for upon the Principles of Mechanism and Motion, the lowest Degree of *Thought* will still be more puzzling; and much more still, those nobler Expansions of it which rise above Sense, correct the Errors of Imagination and Fancy, and so evidently withstand the Influence of corporeal Impressions.

The Substance of a Spirit is every whit as intelligible as that of Body; for indeed we know nothing of either but only of their Properties, and know no farther than they inform us. But what is the Support of those Properties, or the Substance in which they are inherent, we are equally at a Loss for both in one Case and in the other. The main Property of the one is *Thought*; those of the other do plainly speak it a  
passive

passive Principle, capable of divers Figures, and receptive of various Motions; tho' neither Motion nor Figure, how various or how diversified soever, have the least Alliance with Thought or Reason. In all the Experiments which have been made, and all the various Forms which have been put upon it, nothing yet has appeared which has spoke the least Degree of Self-Activity. The Chymist with all his Art has never yet extracted the most imperfect Thought, from his most labour'd Operations. Nor is there the least Ground of suspecting any Capacity in Matter for it. If Subtlety of Parts and Rapidity of Motion could help to perform this wondrous Operation, one would expect the most of it from a fiery Furnace. The Air, or that subtler Liquid it is supposed to swim in, might have as fair a Chance for it as any Body in the Universe. You discern not, I am persuaded, in that of Man, any of the Fluids more fit than these, for sustaining this wondrous Character, or for producing this marvellous Effect. You observe

serve indeed (what might mislead an *unwary* Reasoner) a most intimate Alliance between Soul and Body; and a great Dependence of the former upon the latter in most of its Operations. Whether (as it should seem) our Spirits were made by the Creator of all Things, to act most perfectly in a material Vehicle; or whether the Laws of their Union, do suspend or discontinue the Actions of the Soul, when the Body is maim'd or ruinous; this all may easily be conceiv'd to flow from the original Appointment of that Providence which allied them together upon such Conditions. Now this indeed must be allow'd to prove a reciprocal Dependence between them; but will by no Means infer an Identity of Substance, nor allow us to confound the Distinction of their Natures.

If then the Soul of Man be a pure incorporeal Spirit, it will lead us I say unavoidably to God its Creator, who made it after his own Image. Nay were it possible for any Figuration of Body to improve into Thought and Reason,



Reason, yet the Art of so modifying it, would however proclaim a divine Artificer. Either Way it will appear, that *the Lord hath formed the Spirit of Man within him*, and that *he hath made us this Soul*. And thus both our Souls and Bodies will prove God their Father, and that *we are all the Work of his Hands*.

This was my *first* and chief Observation from the Text.

II. My *second* was, its attributing to God the Disposal and Government of such Events as concern us. This now the Nature of God assuredly proves to us, and the Circumstances of Man are such as stand in great need of it: For the Essence of God being every where diffused, his Knowledge and Observation must needs accompany it; so that he must remark every Occurrence upon this great Theatre, observe the Conduct of every Actor, the secret Springs of every Motion, the Nature, Posture and Relation of all Things; all the Modes and Circumstances, the Differences and Varieties,

Varieties, the Changes and Affections of every Being. We are apt here to misrepresent God to our own Imaginations, to conceive of him as limited to some particular Place, and thence very hardly apprehend the Possibility of such an universal Inspection. But if we would consider him as he really is, an Infinite Omnipresent Spirit, encompassing and filling all Things with his diffusive and boundless Nature; his Inspection of all Things would then be easily conceivable, as being indeed the necessary Result of his Omnipresence. For his Power must act, and his Wisdom discern, wherever he is; his Perfections must all be active, all vigorous, vital, and efficacious, and inseparable from his Essence; so that he can no more in Truth and Propriety be conceiv'd as not seeing all Things, than a Man can be conceiv'd with his Eyes sound and open, not seeing the Light when it shines in upon him with its fullest Brightness. There needs here no Attentiveness of Thought, no Labour of the Mind, to discern what offers it self so readily, as every

every Thing must do to the Eyes of that Being who is *over* all, *thro'* all, and *in* all. But now to suppose Infinite Power doing nothing; Infinite Goodness a restive, unsociable, uncommunicative Principle; Infinite Wisdom seeing, regarding, observing nothing of what passes upon this great Theatre, is a very scurvy Complement to those glorious Attributes. For either these Perfections are active, wherever there are proper Objects to employ them, or they are nothing but empty Sounds; so that if God cannot be conceiv'd without them, they must every where have their proper Energy and Influence; and all the Creation must be replenish'd with them.

What can be meant by distinguishing between a general and a particular Providence, is not so easy to be apprehended. But I suppose that Providence which takes Care of the whole, will be allowed to take Care of every Part. And if more Trouble were conceivable in the one than in the other, yet the infinite Perfections of God, entirely take away the



the Ground of the Distinction. Now  
 What the Nature of God does thus  
 assure to us, the Circumstances of Man  
 make still more credible; that as we are  
 his Offspring, we are the Objects of his  
 providential Care and Government.  
 'Tis evident we want it, and that no  
 human Power is alone sufficient for this  
 Province. So that if the most High did  
 not preside in it, and rule in the King-  
 doms of the Earth, it were hardly con-  
 ceivable they should long subsist amidst  
 so great a Variety of contradictory  
 Desires and inconsistent Passions. But  
 to temper these, and improve them in-  
 to a just Harmony; to produce Agree-  
 ment out of so many jarring Principles,  
 at least so far to reconcile them as is ne-  
 cessary to the tolerable Subsistence and  
 Order of human Societies; to adjust the  
 various Pretensions, and allwage the  
 tempestuous Passions, and soften the  
 stubborn Wills of its different Subjects;  
 to protect the few Innocent against the  
 many Notent, to restrain the Licentious  
 and Lawless; and to keep them for the  
 main within proper Boundaries: This  
 is

is the great and peculiar Work of an all-wise almighty Providence; it can belong to none but the Searcher of Hearts; and that same Goodness which mov'd him to create us, inclines him further to consult our Happiness by engaging in the Government of his Creatures.

Finally besides the great Works of creating and governing us,

III. The Text ('twas observ'd in the *Third Place*) ascribes to God, the Continuance and Preservation of our Being; that is, the sustaining, upholding and securing to us, the Continuance of all necessary Powers for the Discharge of our several Functions. And in this Sense, I suppose, it is, that the Concurrence of God is said to be necessary to every Action of Men; inasmuch as those internal Principles of Action which are peculiar to Beings endow'd with Liberty, owe all their Continuance to his preserving Providence. It does not indeed appear, that Independency, or Self-Subsistence are Qualities compatible with any Thing that is made; or

that any Being besides the great Creator, has in it self a Sufficiency for its own Existence during an Hour, or the least Part of it. We are misled into an Opinion of such a Sufficiency in the Things of Nature, from observing, that outward Force is necessary to make all the Changes we see made in them. But this now infers no inward Principle of Existence, independent on the Creator's Will. It is true, that whilst he wills their Continuance, nothing can destroy them; but yet his Concurrence may still be necessary, to the Conservation of their several Powers, and their Fitness for the Ends to which he appointed them. But however this be, since Life in Man depends upon so many delicate and curious Springs from within, and may be otherwise destroy'd by various and common Accidents from without, it is fit we should acknowledge the Preservation of our Life and Spirit, as owing to the Inspections of his gracious Providence; that it is *he, who maketh us dwell in Safety; that we live and move, and have our Being in him; that in his Hand is the*  
Soul



*Soul of every living Thing, and the Breath of all Mankind.* For if any Thing upon Earth be allow'd to employ his Superintendence, surely the Life of Man may claim its Share in his favourable Protection.

Thus I have spoke to the several Observations deduc'd from my Text, with less of Accuracy than the Subject deserv'd; but yet, I hope, with more of Illustration and Proof than it needed; in this Audience.

I proceed now to infer from it what may be suitable to the Subject, and to the Occasion of your present Assembly. And

*First,* God's being our Creator, Governor and Preserver, teaches to his Creatures Dependence, and to his Subjects Obedience. We are both the one and the other; and a due Sense of our Dependence will lead us to Obedience. This therefore it will become us to improve and cultivate upon all proper Occasions: For there is no Man too wise nor too big to acknowledge himself the Creature of God. The greatest Honour

we can lay claim to, is the Relation we stand in to him, and the Appellation wherewith we are privileged to invoke him, of *Abba Father*. You, in particular, whose Profession leads you to observe more accurately than others, the Beauty and Contrivance of his most labour'd Workmanship, you cannot better express your Sense of it, nor more properly enter upon the Celebration of this your annual Solemnity, than by these stated Acts of Homage and Acknowledgement. Others may worship their Maker with good Meaning, and acceptably adore him for all the marvellous Works of his Providence; but your Example will carry a peculiar Weight and Influence, because it will be supposed you praise him here with *peculiar Understanding*.

*Secondly*, The Wisdom of God, observable in the Works of Creation and Providence, should teach us the greatest Reverence for it. It is deservedly accounted a considerable Attainment in Knowledge to advance in the Philosophy of Nature, to trace up Effects to their

their proper Causes, to observe the Connexion between them, with the Beauty and Usefulness of the Things which are made. But how much more admirable and more amazing must that Wisdom be, which contriv'd the original Platform, and made out the first Draught of the Creation ! Which deriving its Knowledge from no other Fountain than that of its own inexhaustible Omniscience, nor betaking to other Helps than those of its own uncontrollable Power ; first drew out the Scheme of this marvellous Fabric, and then with one Almighty Word commanded it into Existence ! A Wisdom this, so extensive and so wonderful, that all created Understandings should worship and bow before it ; All Pride of Imaginations be humbled ; and every high Thing cast down, which exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God. If then, in considering the Works of Nature and Providence, we discern for the main evident Tokens of Design and Contrivance ; and can trace out the *Ends* by the *Means* which lead to them ; we should not de-



tract from the Praises of divine Wisdom, when our Views are less clear, and our Discoveries less entertaining, and the Tracts of Design and Forecast less observable. Some Things heretofore have been thought superfluous, which now are well known to have their Use and Advantage. And some Things therefore may now be thought so, whose Uses perhaps are reserv'd to the Diligence and Discovery of future Generations. It is the least we can allow to the Honour of infinite Wisdom, to suppose it above the Reach and Fathom of finite Understandings. But from you we may more especially expect this Deference to the Wisdom of the great Creator, because you see so much of it, and cannot but be convinc'd there are vast Treasures of Knowledge in Reserve, enough to employ the acutest Enquirer to the World's End.

If the Existence of God be in Question, you have many Arguments to urge in Praise and Proof of his Wisdom; and an Answer in Readiness to those who would clog the Notion with Difficulties;

ties; since you daily converse with Difficulties, and yet are sure of the Truths which may seem to be affected by them. If his Providence be disputed, you see and know how frail and mutable Life is, and how much it stands in need of such a Supporter and Preserver. If Mysteries be choak'd at, and his Revelations question'd, for asserting what's above the Reach of our Capacities; the Nature of Man, and the Nature of every Thing, abounds (you know) with Mysteries: It is your daily Care to preserve that Life which you find it so hard to account for. Now if there be so much Difficulty in comprehending the *Works* of God; you will the less be inclined to wonder, if many Things in his *Nature* be dark and incomprehensible.

You are well aware, that the boldest Pretenders to Knowledge are commonly the Smatterers in it. The first Dawnings of Light deceive them, and make them misconstrue a Twylight for broad Day. But they who have been longer in quest of it, and made better Progress, are content in this State of Weakness to

know *in Part*, rather than lose what *may* be had for the Sake of what *cannot*. They will consider the vast and unlimited Compass of Truth; and the Frailties of human Understanding; and therefore will readily accept such Helps, as are offer'd them, and be thankful for the gracious Discovery.

*Thirdly*, Since God is our common Creator, Governor and Preserver, let us remember the Duties we owe to each other, as Fellow-Creatures and Fellow-Subjects; as Members of the same Community, and united together by the Ties of a common Interest. As one God created, and rang'd us in a Class of the same Species, we owe to each other all the Offices of Humanity and Benevolence. As we have Opportunity we must therefore *do good to all Men*; so that whatever introduces the *Opportunity*, fastens upon us the *Obligation*; and therefore every new Relation and Posture of Life, ties us in a Bond of some fresh Duty. What Men as Men, and Christians as Christians, and Countrymen as Countrymen owe to each other; these



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these are common Duties which affect us all as Members of the same Neighbourhood and Community. But to the Endearments of *Men*, and *Christians* and *Countrymen*, you have superadded this further Bond, of a common Engagement in the same useful Profession. Go on therefore with united Hands and Hearts, to improve and to adorn it; to build upon the Foundations of solid Knowledge and Virtue; to assist each other with friendly Communication, with meek and condescensive Counsel. Finally remember whose Instruments you are, which will at once commend the Honour of the Profession, and the Modesty of the Professor. It will derogate nothing from the just Commendations due to your several Attainments, if you acknowledge with the Psalmist's Piety; *except the Lord build the House, their Labour is but lost that build it*. So long as Skill is the common Condition of Success in Cases which want it, you will have (as 'tis fit) all due Encouragements, which Religion will never attempt to lessen. We honour (as we ought)

ought) the Channels thro' which we receive the Blessings of Providence; more especially where they concur in procuring, and are necessary to the obtaining them. It will therefore become both you and me, to join together in our Prayers to God, *that he would prosper the Work of your Hands upon you*; that he would bless your Endeavours for restoring Ease to those who are in Pain, and Strength to those who labour under Infirmities; that so *with you, and for you*, they may ascribe

*To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
Praise, Adoration and Thanksgiving to  
their Lives end.*

*To whom be Glory and Dominion now  
and ever.*

S E R M O N



## SERMON II.

HEB. xi. 6.

*He that cometh to God must believe  
that he is; and that he is a Re-  
warder of them that diligently  
seek him.*



**T**HIS whole Chapter repre-  
sents to us, the Necessity and  
Advantage of Faith in God;  
the Reason and Recompence  
of it are both set out; what it is in it-  
self, what it has been to others, and  
therefore what it *may* probably be to us  
in its Consequences, we have histori-  
cally



cally deduc'd to us from the Beginning to the End of the Chapter.

What it is, the very first Verse will inform us, which defines it to be *the Substance of Things hoped for, and the Evidence of Things not seen*; where our Translation seems to have fallen a little short of the Author's Meaning; who in all Likelihood design'd to call it a *confident Expectation* of the Things hoped for; a full and satisfactory Dependence upon them; that God would perform his Promises concerning them,

And that this might not appear a vain and delusive Prospect, but might approve it self a rational and well founded Hope, the Author has been careful to add, that this Persuasion of the Mind has Argument to support it; that it is a Conviction founded upon Reason concerning the Truth of those Matters which it professes to depend on: For it is *the Evidence of Things not seen*. Thus much for its *Nature*. Its *Advantages* are deduc'd historically, thro' various Instances of *Kingdoms subdued, and Righteousness wrought, and Promises*

*misers obtain'd by it ; all manifesting it to be the Way which leads to God's Favour.*

And to these my Text has added its *Necessity*, that the Man who would *come to God*, who would make acceptable approaches to him, or entitle himself to his present or future Favour; *must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of such as diligently seek him.* It is plain therefore, as Scripture can make it, that we are not *free* in this Matter to believe or not believe, as we have a Mind to it; but it is enjoin'd us as a Duty, and that Duty is enforc'd by a Penalty of the last Importance: We must not pretend to come to God, without believing his Existence and Providence, and a State of future Retributions.

I shall endeavour to shew, that this Obligation is a just and fit one; that it answers many great and necessary Purposes; and impeaches not the natural Rights or Liberties of Mankind.

I. Now *first*, the Justice of it arises from the Right of the Creator, who has  
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actually

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actually demanded it; and then its Fitness will

II. *Secondly* appear, from the *Ends* to which it is subservient, in the Order of a necessary *mean*.

I. The hardest Knot in this whole Question is, the Power a Man has to command or withhold the Assent of his own Mind, which is always governed (as we say) by apparent Evidence; so that if there be no *apparent Evidence*, there can follow no Assent; and if there be, Assent must follow, whether the Man be willing or no; and thus to believe or not believe, should seem to be no proper Matter for a *Command*, which ever supposes a Power to *obey*.

1. The Foundation therefore, must *first* be cleared before we can build upon it; the Duty must appear to be within the Compass of our Wills to regulate it; or else it can be no Duty.

2. And when once it shall appear to be so, it easily then will follow, in the *second Place*, that God with the strictest Justice may require it.

i. The



1. The *first* Thing then to be done upon this Question is to clear its Foundation; and to shew that our Wills do often interpose in this Province of *Believing*; that they do speed or retard, do withhold, suspend, or determine the Assent to, or from, the Truth of many Propositions which come before the Mind; and are there admitted or rejected, according to the Propensities of the Will, in Prejudice or in Favour of them. *Real Evidence* is not always the Cause of Belief, nor *want* of it the Reason which keeps Men from it. Whoever is *given up to strong Delusions*, and to *believe a Lye*, has certainly no *Evidence* for such a Belief; he has indeed the Appearance of it, and what he imagines to be Evidence determines his Assent. Now that he mistakes the *Shadow* for the *Substance*, that he accepts *Appearances* instead of *Realities*, and suffers the *Show* to pass upon him for *Argument*; is doubtless owing to Causes, which it is the Province of his Will to adjust and regulate. For Example, if any criminal Passion has either darkned his Understanding,

derstanding, or dazzled it with a false and deceitful Light ; the *Effect* will be *criminal*, because the *Cause* was *faulty* ; and the *Error* hence arising will be imputed for *Sin*, because its Foundation was laid in a perverse *Will*. The Affection which thus warps the Judgment, is often so obvious, and lies so much upon the Surface of the Mind, that a By-Stander may discern it, and may safely pronounce upon it, without fearing the Imputation of a rash or erroneous Censure.

But then, what often escapes the Observation of *Man* ; what is too involv'd and intricate for *human* Discernment, and is hid in the secret Recesses and Workings of the Heart, is perfectly naked and open to the Sight of *God* ; who can easily trace the minuteft Motions of the Soul thro' all the Labyrinth of her various Affections ; thro' all the Impediments of Prejudice, the Obstinacies of a rooted Dislike, the Swellings of Pride, the Partialities of Self-Love, the Misrepresentations of Fancy, the Clouds of a disorder'd Imagination ; and what-  
ever

ever else may be thought to intercept the Light of Truth, to straiten it in its Passage, or to preclude its Access to the Will and Understanding. He then who sees so clearly into the Cause of the Error, may *justly* command the *Removal* of it; may expect, and may insist that the Evidence of important Truths should be admitted into the Mind without Lett or Hindrance; as knowing assuredly, that upon the Removal of all faulty Impediments, the Light must shine in upon it clearly and convincingly.

A Man is hindred, perhaps by Pride or Hatred, from accepting an Evidence, which is commonly receiv'd and allow'd for such; and consequently from embracing the Persuasion which is built upon it. That Pride or Hatred continuing, the Motions of his Mind will be still the same, and will lead him still on in his usual Way of Thinking and Believing. Shall it then be allow'd him, to plead the Impossibility of his thinking or believing otherwise; because it is indeed impossible, whilst he perseveres in those criminal and vicious

D

Dispo-



Dispositions? No surely! But let him rather throw aside the *faulty Causes*, and the *Effects* will then be no longer *faulty*.

What Degrees of Guilt may be hence contracted, *Man* may not take upon him precisely to determine, because no *Man* can exactly know the Motions of another's Heart.

But yet there are Truths, whose Evidence is naturally so clear and shining, that *Man* may determine the *Hindrances* to be *very criminal*, which prevent the Acceptance of it; and therefore may pronounce the *Error*, which rejects it, *damnable*. The State of that *Man* in particular, who shall thus reject it, is not hence prejudg'd nor determined; His Heart is left to its proper Searcher; who observes it (doubtless) in all its Wandrings; and as it is mis-led by Motives more or less criminal, will either receive him to Compassion; or allot him to a heavier, or a lighter Condemnation.

The Sentence which *Man* in this Case pretends to pass, is only *General*, and rather

rather affects the *Error* itself, than the Person holding it.

It is confessed, that all Truths are neither equally clear nor equally momentous; yet some there are of the highest Importance, which stand in so strong a Light, that they may be pronounced apparent and visible to all who have Eyes, and are willing to use them.

The Apostle has mention'd a Blindness of Heart, which will *alienate* a Man from *the Life, and the Knowledge of God*.

But then if he has put out his own Light, he must be content to bear the *Blame*, as well as the *Misfortune* of not seeing. And where the Light to others is clear and splendid, they may safely censure him for his not discerning it. In the Niceties of Colours, Men may be allow'd to vary from each others Judgments. But no Man will endure a Dispute about black and white.

A Man has apparently then some *Power within himself*, some *Use of his Will* in the Case before us. As he inclines with his Will, or exerts this Power, he

either gives or with-holds his Assent *to* or *from* the Truth propounded to him; in fine, he *manages* the Evidence, raises or softens it; attends to this or that Side of the Question, as Inclination prompts him. So that he is not entirely passive in its Reception; but by turning his Mind *from* the Light, or *to* it; by receiving it *obliquely* or *directly*, he can vary the *Colour* represented by it; and so can either weaken, or strengthen the Evidence it would imprint upon him. Thus much is certainly within our Power. And therefore

*Secondly*, I observe (upon this Ground) that God may with the strictest *Justice* determine our Use of it. He who *gave* us the Power, has an undoubted Right to *employ* it; nor may the Creature take upon him to vie Titles with the Creator; nor to plead any Privilege exempting him from a Conformity to his Maker's Pleasure.

Whatever is *possible* to be done, may become the Matter of *Duty*, if a competent *Authority* shall think fit to enjoin it. Now

To



To remove the faulty Hindrances of Belief, is what every Man *has*, or once *had* in his Power. And therefore the Neglect of exerting it, is justly chargeable to his Account, as an Instance of Guilt; and of Disobedience to that Authority which has expressly commanded him to lay aside those amongst other Weights.

It must certainly be some very perverse Affection, which shall hinder a Man from apprehending the *invisible Things of God*, [from the Creation of the World] since they may be so *clearly seen and understood by the Things which are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead*; so that he is without Excuse, who does not apprehend them; nor will it therefore be allowed to pass in his Apology, that he was desirous of preserving his Thoughts in their native Freedom, of looking impartially into both Sides of the Question; and of determining his Assent to the fairest Appearances.

We allow, nay we insist upon this Privilege as much as the Men who most loudly claim it. But then we say,

that the Man has really least Use of this boasted Freedom, who clogs and choaks it with the Impediments of any Passion.

The Removal of these Impediments we press upon him for Duty, in the Name of God; we beseech and exhort him to use his Reason, as *freely* as he pleases; and more *freely* far, than we apprehend he does.

But let not then this just and innocent Liberty degenerate into a wanton Licence of playing away his Reason; and of sporting with the most sacred and important Truths.

Here, I beseech you, let it ever be remember'd that there may be a Prejudice *against* receiv'd Notions, as well as *for* them; the one, as the *more unnatural*, seems of the two the *less pitiable Error*; having usually indeed more of Conceit and of vicious Passion, at its Bottom, than the other has; and therefore being more *Criminal* in the *Cause*, may be more *punishable* in the *Effect*. 'Tis granted, that

Error shou'd never be received upon the Plea of Prescription only; but then

then neither should Truth be rejected, because it happens to be favoured by the prevailing Opinion.

The Great Truths of Religion, have so much Evidence to support them; and where Evidence has really free Access to the Mind, *Belief* does so surely follow it, that there would be no need of requiring our *Faith*, if the Obstructions were removed, which stand in the way of it.

Now these Obstructions being faulty in their Original, and fatal (as we shall see) in their Consequence, it may very justly be required of us not to harbour nor indulge them. And then we should in Course *believe*, when the Reason for believing is pressing and cogent, and when the Obstacles are remov'd, which are apt to prevent or weaken the Conviction. Mean while, God never requires us to *believe* without sufficient Evidence; but only to dissipate those Clouds, and to weed out of our Minds those faulty Causes of Infidelity, which darken the Light of our Evidence, and hinder it from shining in



upon us with its native Lustre.

If therefore we are required to believe the Existence of a Being, adorn'd with infinite Perfection; it is not hence expected, that we should silence our Reason; but rather that we should to the utmost exert its Powers; the Freedom of our Thoughts from all corrupt and partial Regards, from every unfair and enslaving Byass, is what God in this Case demands of us: And if we thus proceed, the Issue may easily be warranted, that no Man in his Senses can avoid believing the Existence of his Maker. And now of this, his Providence is so clear a Consequence, that if no cloudy Affection interpose between them, the Premises and the Conclusion will never separate. And a future State cannot then be dubious, when the Existence and Providence of God are once ascertained.

The Belief of these Things is so suitable to the natural Apprehensions of Mankind, that there would (I say) be no need of requiring it, were it not for that unnatural Force, and those Chains  
of

Darkness which the Passions of Men have put upon their Reason. And therefore (in the Truth of the Case) the Demand amounts to no more than this; that they would indeed assert the Freedom of their Reason; or (in the Words of the Apostle) that they would labour to deliver it from the Bondage of Corruption into the glorious Liberty of the Children of God.

This is what may as justly be demanded as any other Instance of moral Virtue; being equally in their Power; and what we are next proceeding to observe as *fit* an Article of Obedience. Which will appear if we consider

II. *Secondly*, Those great and weighty *Ends* whereunto this *Faith* is subservient in the Order of a necessary *Mean*, without which those Ends can never be obtain'd; and with which they may easily and successfully be accomplish'd. It will be enough to convince us of the necessary Connection between *Faith* and *Virtue*, if we do but remark, in passing, upon the three great Branches of Duty, respecting

respecting God, our Neighbour and our Selves; and observe (as we go along) how each of these is affected, by a Belief that *God is, and that he is a Rewarder of such as diligently seek him.*

I. *First* then, as to the Duties respecting God. The whole Range of these is at once cut off, if we drop the Belief of his Existence and Providence. For

We can pay him no Homage, make him no Submissions, repose no Trust in him, entertain no Love for him, harbour no Fear of him, fix upon him no Dependence, nor maintain with him any Intercourse; if we believe him to have *no* Existence, but in human Fancy. It implies a Contradiction to suppose we should perform any Act of Duty towards a Being, whom we believe to have indeed *no* Being. If his Providence be doubted, the Case as to us will be much the same; since a Being whom we are no Way concern'd with, is to us *no* Being; we can pay him no Acknowledgements, and can expect nothing from him, either of Good or Evil.

The



The Denial of a future State carries with it the same Conclusion, and saps the Foundation of all religious Approaches to him; for if in *this* Life only we have hope, the present Government of the World bears no such apparent Signatures of Distinction between Vice and Virtue, that we can certainly thence conclude, either the one to be the Object of his Hatred, or the other of his Love; nor can we consequently fasten any sure Dependence upon the Exercise of his *Providence*; and if not upon his *Providence*, not upon his *Being*. Let but one single Link of this Chain be broken, and the whole will fall in Pieces. *That God is, and that he is a Rewarder of such as diligently seek him*, are Articles so necessarily *connected*, that they cannot subsist *asunder*; nor can any Act of Religion be perform'd, where one of those Articles is rejected.

But now suppose them all embrac'd, receiv'd with a full and cordial Persuasion; and then it will be easy to conceive, how well the Practice may proceed, which is founded upon such a Principle.

If

If there Exists a Being adorn'd with infinite Perfection, who is over all, and thro' all and in all; if we are fully persuaded that he interests himself in our Affairs, and regards our Actions, and desires our Advantages, what Acts of Love and Trust, and Submission and Dependence may not fairly be expected from such an Apprehension? For to trust in a *perfect* Being, is to repose our Confidence in what can never fail us; to submit to his Appointments, is to chuse what is best and fittest for us in the State we are at present under. To *love* him, is to fix our Affection upon the most deserving Object; and to express our Dependence in suitable Acts of Prayer and Thanksgiving, is to employ the best Member which we have after the best Manner.

None of all this is possible, *without* the Belief which my Text demands of us; *with* it the Consequences are scarce avoidable.

So that, God in this Demand proceeds with us as a Governor, requiring from us, what tends in its Nature, to the  
most

most advantageous Purposes, and what he could not therefore neglect, without apparent Damage to the great Community.

If any then shall object; let them remember they are objecting against the general and publick Good; which can never so effectually be consulted, as by a prevailing Belief, that the World *is govern'd and shall be judged* by a just and holy God, who regards our Actions, and will reward or punish us according to them. So that if there be reason to support this Belief, it was fit on all Accounts to be exacted of us; that his Being and Providence should be solemnly acknowledged, who gave us a Being, and who holds up our Goings in Life. For,

2. *Secondly*, Without such a Persuasion the social Virtues respecting our Neighbour, are as little likely to be regarded, as those which more immediately relate to God.

Some Restraint and some Check the Sinner perhaps may meet with from *human* Laws; which extend themselves as far



far as they can to the Safe-Guard of our Neighbour in his Property and Person, and to the Defence and Security of his legal Rights. But they can never extend their Efficacy, where there is any reasonable Prospect of Secrecy or Shelter in the Transgression of them.

There can indeed be no universal Balance against the Temptations to Sin, but what has its hold in the Consciences of Men. Temporal Punishments are what they may easily flatter themselves with a Hope of escaping by various Arts and Stratagems; but an *all-seeing* Eye is what they cannot pretend to lye conceal'd from: *Almighty Power* is what no Creature can think himself able to resist; *pure and unblemish'd Holiness* is an Attribute which they can never suppose will suffer their Sin to escape without its proper Punishment.

But now if this Belief be discarded, I need not stand to represent the Consequence, since, I persuade my self, you already anticipate it in your own Thoughts. If there be no Security for the Rights of Mankind, but that which  
is

is founded in *human* Laws; these in a thousand Instances will fail us, wherever the Power or Craft of the Offender shall be found sufficient to defeat them. But numberless Examples of Virtue must necessarily lose their best Recommendation, whenever it shall be agreed to drop the Belief of a future Retribution. Gratitude and Friendship, and all the Expressions of a generous Benevolence must be lost to Mankind, when this their greatest (I had almost said their only) support shall fail them. For tho' a Man feels in his own Breast some Part of the Recompence due to a good Action; yet this in Truth is founded upon a certain Presage and Foretaste of a Life to succeed the present, and would indeed be very little valuable without it.

Now human Laws are usually *negative*; they tell us what we should *not* do, and affix a Penalty to such their Prohibition; but then they seldom tell us what we *should* do; or assign any Reward to a Praise-worthy Action. So that tho' they guard against *Vice* by certain

tain Menaces of *Punishment*, they make no due Provision for *Virtue*, by any Promises of Reward; whatever of the latter Kind is expected, lies most of it in *Reversion*; and the Grave is consider'd as the only Gate to it. If therefore this Prospect should be thought to fail us, *Virtue* would be defrauded of its strongest Motive; and the World would be much the worse for that Man, who should happen to introduce such a fatal Persuasion.

The Laws of Religion, and the Sanctions which enforce them, are the best Preservatives against Vice; as well as the surest Supports and Guardians of all useful *Virtue*. And therefore when it is judg'd convenient for the Purposes of *Infidelity* we have *this*, which is indeed the Praise (and Merit) of Religion, improv'd into an Argument against the *Truth* of it; as if it were therefore an *human* Contrivance, because it is found so serviceable to *human* Life; whereas God the Author of every good Work, did indeed contrive it for our Use and Benefit; and the

Contrivance



Contrivance is as ancient, as the Scheme and Model of the Creation. So that to reject it, is to reject the Counsel of God against our selves ; to defeat his Providence of the *Means* to bless us ; to open a Gap for Confusion and every evil Work to enter at : In short, 'tis to disown our Parentage, and to disclaim the Inheritance appendant to it. Finally

The *Personal* Virtues will as ill by this Scheme be consulted, as the *Social*. Take away the Belief of a God who made, and of a Providence which observes us, and there will be left no Reason for the Government of any one Affection where Indulgence to it is attended with no present Mischief. Upon the whole,

The Belief of the great Articles of Religion, is the most valuable Blessing of our present State ; without it our Desires would be boundless, our Joys would be turbulent, our Sorrows would be comfortless, and all our Affections boisterous and raging ; and thus every Man would carry in his own Breast an implacable and fierce Tormenter.

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But

But the Belief of a future State calms and qualifies the Intemperance and Disorder of these various Motions ; teaches us to use this World without abusing it ; to govern our Desires, to temper our Joys, and to moderate our Sorrows. And by thus instructing us, provides for our Ease, and guards against the most general Causes of all our Misery.

Where then is the Hardship, or where the Impeachment of any becoming Liberty, if a Persuasion be demanded of us which has so much Usefulness to recommend, and so much Reason to support it ? Which, if it were generally rejected, would rob the World of its best Security, and of its greatest Blessing ; by bereaving the Virtuous of their brightest Hope and Joy ; and by ridding the Vicious of their most perplexing Fear and Torment. So that

If God has suspended his Favour upon this Condition, and will suffer none to *come to him*, who do not own his Sovereignty and Providence ; rather than arraign his Benignity, we should praise and thank him for such a wise Provision.

I shall

I shall add but this one Thing further and then shall finish; that these good Tendencies of Natural Religion, are all of them improved and heightened by the Christian; and therefore where God has promulg'd it with sufficient Evidence, he may, for the Reasons which have here been given, require the Belief of it, under the Penalty of refusing our Approaches to him without it. Since in the Truth and Justice of Things the Faculty whereby we *believe*, is subject as much to the Regulations of its Author, as the Faculty whereby we *act*; nor doth *apparent Evidence determine the one*, any more or otherwise than *apparent Good* doth determine the *other*; so that our *Assent* may as properly be demanded upon sufficient Evidence, as a good Action may be, upon a fit Opportunity and sufficient Help.

There must be a Fault in our Application of this Evidence to our Understanding, whenever it fails of working the Conviction it was made to produce. The Cure of this Fault is a just Expectation of God from us, who will him-



Ephes. i.  
18, 19.

self concur with our honest Endeavours, to enlighten the Eyes of our Understanding, that we may know what is the Hope of his Calling, and what the Riches of the Glory of his Inheritance in the Saints; and what is the exceeding Greatness of his Power to usward who believe.

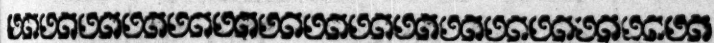
Now that we may all so live, as not to be afraid of believing, and so believe as to come at last to God; let us beseech him of his infinite Mercy, that he would shew unto them who be in Error, the Light of his Truth, to the Intent that they may return into the Way of Righteousness; that he would grant unto all them who are admitted into the Fellowship of *Christ's* Religion, that they may eschew those Things which are contrary to their Profession; and follow all such Things as are agreeable to the same, thro' our Lord *Jesus Christ*.

*To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be ascribed all Honour and Glory now and ever.*

S E R M O N

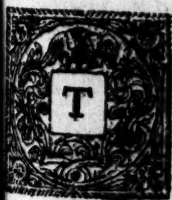


## SERMON III.



PSALM lxxiii. 25.

*Whom have I in Heaven but thee?  
And there is none upon Earth  
that I desire besides thee.*



THE general Design and Pur-  
port of the Psalm is to dis-  
course upon the Providence  
of God, and more especially  
upon that signal Part of it,  
the Prosperity of the Wicked, and the  
Afflictions of the Righteous. Here  
the Author represents the desponding  
E 3 Thoughts

Thoughts, which even good Men are apt to entertain and harbour, when they observe the Successes and Insolencies of those who fear not God. Yet such Thoughts as these, (he intimates) are or should be all corrected upon farther Consideration; and good Men should in no Condition of Life or Fortune be moved to depart from their Trust in God: Since there is and can be, no Resort so sure, as to his infinite Wisdom, Goodness and Power. *This* World can furnish no Comforts, the *other* no Affluences, equal to those which may be derived from his All-sufficiency. Whatsoever Cloud may at present darken, or whatsoever Veil may here intercept the Light of his Countenance, yet the Men of Probity and Religion may depend upon it, that it will never finally be withdrawn from them. Mean while they may support and satisfy themselves with all Assurances of their Interest in him, who is able to save to the uttermost, and willing to exert his Power, whenever 'tis expedient, in favour of such as honour and obey him. If they

cast



cast about for any Resources, exclusive of these, resort to any Powers of this World or of the other, or to any Means of Deliverance and Success which have not God along with them, the Result will manifest the Folly of their Counsel; and it will appear how utterly insufficient every Thing besides him is for answering their Hopes, for silencing their Fears, for easing their Troubles, or for procuring their desired Happiness.

*Whom have I in Heaven, but thee? And there is none upon Earth that I desire besides thee.* In which Words these two Particulars are strongly implied:

I. The Insufficiency of any worldly Good for the Happiness of Man.

II. The absolute Necessity of an infinitely perfect Being, to make Man completely happy.

I. The Insufficiency of any worldly Good for this great Purpose, arises partly from the Nature of *Man*, and partly from the Nature of *Things*.

I. The Nature of *Man* in his present State, makes it impossible for him to be completely happy. He hath *Hopes* which cannot be answer'd, and *Fears* which cannot be silenced, and *Desires* which will not be satisfied: His Reason is too short-sighted to go to the Bottom of any Thing; and yet the present Moment is all which he is sure of; the vast Abyss of Futurity is (in every *Part* of it) conjectural and uncertain to him. Mean while his Passions are fierce and raging, his Ability to resist them feeble and impotent, and even the Powers which he has, he scarce can find in his Heart to exert with Vigour or Constancy. Be the Posture of Things about him never so agreeable, yet his Palate is often distemper'd, his Taste is sickly, and he can relish nothing. Somewhat he would have, for which he hath no Name nor Notion; there is a Leanness upon his Soul, an Hunger and a Thirst after some unknown, unconceiv'd, tho' not undesired Enjoyment. Or if there be not this; and if his Passions ran out in Quest of those various Objects which  
the

the World abounds with; here is Weariness and Vexation of Spirit, even with his best Successes; he is tired in the Pursuit, ever and anon loses Sight of it; and when he recovers it, is almost out of Breath, can enjoy but little of it; and even that little with many Abatements, many Interruptions; with a Mind ill at Ease in its present Mansion, yet afraid of a Removal; and with a Body made up of frail and brittle Materials, promising at most no long Continuance, always in want of Repairs, often tottering, gradually decaying, and qualified in its best Estate for no mighty Purposes. The Mind indeed can muse upon a thousand Things, in which her earthly Tabernacle is too gross and heavy to follow her: But the *Soul* is often obliged to follow her corruptible *Body* thro' many ugly Stages; wherein most of her Time and Labour is employ'd at Hazards; so that she hath very few Opportunities of pushing her most important Business of improving in Wisdom and Virtue, or of making her Approaches to her own proper Good.

In



In fine, we know nothing but in Part, our Affections hurry us hither and thither, without Rule or Compass; we are stiddy to no one Design, or we have no uniform nor settled Means of pursuing it. *Present* Good is too thin to satisfy, all *future* Prospects in Life are precarious and depending, and a thousand Incidents which we can neither foresee nor prevent, may defeat our Hopes from them; or when Time shall bring them up to us, they may and will prove as delusive and unsatisfactory as any present Enjoyment. The Reason of the Disappointment is a great deal of it founded in the disproportion'd Size of our Faculties, which are too large and mighty for their Object, distinguish at sight its Imperfections and Defects, and repine and complain, that no one can shew them any commensurate or proper Good. Besides, there is a known irreconcilable Quarrel between the leading Powers of our Nature; our Sensitive and our Rational can never here agree their different interfering Pretensions; even if our Rational could allow our

Sensitive

Sensitive in all their Demands, yet would not those Demands be answered, without such Drawbacks and Abatements, and somewhat, in the Result of Things, so contrary to any real Enjoyment, that our Happiness thence could have no fit Provision made for it. The *Trouble* of the *Acquisition*, the *Satiety* of *Sense*, the *Nausea* arising from a Round of *Repetitions*, will at last convince us, that the Pleasures of a *Beast* are no just Implements for the Happiness of a *Man*. The Beasts indeed are much better fitted for the Use and Improvement of them to a great deal more Advantage, and with fewer Hindrances, Interruptions or Abatements. *Forecast* doth not make them anxious, *Expectation* doth not torture, nor doth the Shame of *Reflection* mortify them. Their Desires, their Hopes and Fears (if they have any Thing in their Nature analogous to those human Passions) are contracted within a narrow Compass, and design but a very little beyond the present Moment. And if they have any farther Principle which looks like rational,

tional, they have just enough of it for their present Purposes, and not enough to convince, or to teaze them with the *Reflection*, that they are in want of *more*.

With *Man*, we know, all this is otherwise, who hath the same Affections, only more unlimited in Extent and Compass, taking in a wider View of *past* and *future*, and yet more restrain'd and bounded in his several Gratifications. This, indeed, is all of it fit and justifiable, and in the main conducive to his real Happiness; But then it *so* conduces to his *Happiness*, as to prove him at present in a State of much Imperfection. His Reason (which is far his highest and noblest Privilege) is not without its Burdens and Defects. It sees but a little way before it with any Degree of Clearness or Distinction, and often *blunders* upon the Incidents and Occasions which lie nearest to it: Mean while it lets in upon us a thousand anxious Fears, and tormenting Jealousies, and dark Presages, and corroding Cares, and sinking Apprehensions, which could find no Place  
bnt



but in Minds of such a Cast as ours, who have Reason indeed to govern us, but then 'tis a frail, a broken, and disjointed Talent. As it may assist in leading us to a State of Perfection, we bless the *Father of Lights*, for the Privilege and Advantage of it.

But then, even this its Privilege and Advantage of leading us to a State of Perfection, is a Supposal and a Proof that we are not yet arrived at it. It is, however, the Support of our Spirits, and the Anchor of our Souls amidst the Storms and Pressures of this various unsettled Life, that we are passing hence to our Joy and Crown. And we may well and fitly comfort ourselves under all the Toils and Difficulties of our Passage, and under a Sense of our present Incapacities and Wants; we may comfort ourselves (I say) with the blessed Prospect of coming one Day to the End of our Journey, and thence of settling in perfect Security and Repose. Some present Joy we therefore may have in God upon Hope and Expectation; and were it not for that Hope, our Condition

tion here would be far more miserable. But then, I say, a State of Hope and Expectation implies Imperfection, and supposes our Happiness incomplete and defective. So that the very brightest Circumstance in human Life, hath a dark Side belonging to it, and the most valuable Privilege of human Nature, hath an Alloy which depreciates and impairs it. Now, if even our greatest Joy hath some Degree of *Sadness* in it, what must our *Sadness* itself, and our *Sorrow* be? Wherefore let me add in the

2. *Second Place*; That the Nature of *Things* conspires here with the Nature of *Man*, in making it impossible for him to be completely Happy upon the present Scene.

The *Nature* of Things, or at least the *Posture* of them, *will* not and *cannot* render us completely Happy. They have too much Uncertainty to be depended on, and too much Alloy mix'd up with them to pass for durable or solid Riches. Whilst they are only in *Prospect*, 'tis impossible to be sure of *having* them; when they

they are in *Possession*, 'tis equally out of our Power to ensure the *keeping* them; and when once they have *made themselves Wings* and left us, the *Recovery* of them is as mere a Contingency as either of the *former*. According to the Prudence of the Managers, and the Occasions which are presented to them, various Endeavours are used for obtaining those Things which are esteemed most desirable in human Life. The Nature of Man, and the Wants which arise either from the Frame of his Being, or from prevailing Usage, dispose him to Uneasiness and Discontent, 'till those *Wants* are answered by suitable *Supplies*; now in procuring to these their proper *Answer*, there is *always* much *Uncertainty*, *usually* much *Perplexity*, *often* great Disappointments, and *sometimes* the intended Fence against these several Mischiefs is *unsuccessful Guilt*. The whole Lives of many run out in mere *Prospect* only, and they never know what *Possession* or *Enjoyment* means. If they preserve their Integrity thro' all these dangerous Encounters, they have then *indeed* a *Prospect*



*ſpect*, which, whilſt it is *only* ſo, hath ſo much Eſteem and Value due to it that it ought to be conſidered as in ſome Degree a Recompence. But if their Integrity ſhould be loſt in the Buſtle and Hurry of Life, and (as it is frequently the Caſe) if nothing ſhould in Exchange be got for it, how poor, how unsupported muſt the Spirit of that Man be, who hath little or nothing here to enjoy, and nothing hereafter in View but a fearful looking for of Judgment? We may even venture to push our Suppoſal ſomewhat farther, to conſider him as paſſed the Line of *Proſpect*, and enter'd upon the full *Enjoyment* of this World's Comforts. And yet, alas! if *Innocence* doth not attend him in theſe ſlippery Circumſtances, how little will he find to boaſt of at the Foot of his Account? He cannot (I've ſaid) enſure the Events which Time brings apace upon him; he cannot therefore guard againſt thoſe Contingencies and Misfortunes, which are promiſcuouſly ſcattered thro' the World he lives in; and as he moves up and down in it, 'tis apparent ſome  
Chance

Chance may hit him: So that he can neither secure his Mind from gloomy Perplexities, his Body from wasting Distempers, nor his Fortune from the Casualties to which it is obnoxious. Should all these Chances for Mischief pass smoothly over him, or touch him so gently that he could hardly feel them; yet he can never have the Satisfaction of knowing this beforehand, nor indeed of knowing it at all, 'till the Knowledge of it will do him no good, nor give him the least Entertainment by a pleasant Retrospect; for, till the Day of his *Death*, no Man can certainly foretel that he shall not *live* to see and to feel the worst of them\*: And even if this Point could be adjusted, and all the Enjoyments of Life could be made as sure to him as he would have them; yet Life itself could never be ensured to him, and we are supposing him to have no Prospects beyond it, but what

\* ——— Sed scilicet ultima semper  
Expectanda dies Homini est, dicique beatus  
Ante obitum nemo supremaque funera debet.

*Ovid. Metam.*

will terminate in his infinite Disadvantage. Mean while these Enjoyments themselves (whatever they are) can by no Means fill the Capacities of his Soul. The most which they can do is to make the present Moment, and a few which succeed it, not distasteful nor uneasy to him; to give him a gentle Opiate, which shall keep him for a while in a State of Indolence, and lull his Cares and his Fears asleep. Yet surely there is scarce a Man upon Earth to such a Degree an Infidel, as not to believe that *Guilt* implies *Danger*, a *Possibility*, at least, of consigning the Person who contracts it, to an everlasting Punishment: And whilst this Apprehension hovers over him, what Antidote against it can this World furnish? The most, I have said, which it can do, will be to lay him asleep, to doze and stupify his rational Powers, and to entertain him in the Interim with some pleasant Dreams. And if, when he awakes and returns in earnest to the Use of his Reason, he can call *this* Happiness; 'tis a shrewd Intimation, that Happiness is not design'd  
for



for him, or rather, indeed, a Proof that he is not quite awake. The Men of Religion, such of them, I mean, as most abound in the Comforts of Life, will least want to be told, that these are not the just nor proper Felicities of a reasonable Being; and yet it were easy to prove, that to them, of all Men, those Comforts come the purest, with the fewest Abatements and the least Allay: They will not, however, sink deep into them, nor imagine that their chief, their highest Good can be ever found in them. They feel themselves made for much better and nobler Purposes; and tho' the Faculty which aspires after those higher Attainments be so hamper'd and entangled within its earthly Tabernacle, that it cannot take Wing and flee away, as it would do, to its proper Rest; yet such a Rest, the People of God well know, remains to them; and because they find it not here, they are sure of it hereafter; and therefore they rejoice at present in Hope of the Glory of God.

The Heathen Philosophers had Light enough to make them sensible, that they

stood in need *of more*; and their very *Disputes* about the *supreme Good of Man*, were Proof of this, if of nothing else, that they knew not where to find it. Yet if it had been on this Side the Grave, they of all Men were most capable of finding it, or at least as likely as any to have hit upon it. But what lies *beyond* the Grave, is *what Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can enter into the Heart of Man to conceive*. Only *God hath revealed to us by his Spirit*, what is enough to convince us, that *there* we ought to look for it. If no one here can *shew us any good*, any thing which doth truly deserve the Name of it; if no Man, no created Power can lead us to it; the *Light of God's Countenance* is the only Resort remaining to us, and him we should beseech to *lift it up upon us*.

Which, from the Insufficiency of any worldly Good for the Happiness of Man, leads me to consider, (under my second General)

II. The absolute Necessity of an infinitely perfect Being to make Man completely

completely Happy. For if the Creature cannot do it, 'tis evident that either it is not to be done at all, or else the Creator alone must do it, must furnish this much-desired, much-wanted Happiness. An All-wise Being, (we are sure) who doth every thing in Number, Weight and Measure, would never have form'd such a disproportionate ill-shaped Design, as of making any Faculty which might not somewhere find an Object to suit and to tally with it; so that there must be somewhere an Happiness equal and commensurate to the largest Capacity, and to the most unbounded Desire of the greatest Soul. It is not (we have seen) in *this* World, and therefore (if we expect to find it) we must look for it in *another*.

Yet even in *Heaven* itself we shall in vain look for it, without a direct Resort to him who *sitteth upon the Throne thereof*. For tho' there *may be Gods many, and Lords many*, yet to us there is *but one God, and one Good which is God*. Let us therefore examine what are the essential Qualifications of an All-sufficient Good, that we may be sure we



are right, in resorting to *God* for it.

1st. Then let us consider, that *God* is Almighty, and so can *do whatever he pleaseth in Heaven and Earth*. Wherever therefore the Ingredients of our Happiness are scattered, he can bring them together, and make the *Faculty* and its *Object* meet. Our present State of Weakness and Depression mortifies us frequently with our Want of Power. We cannot govern the Event of Things, nor the Passions of Men; nor prevent those various Interferings of Interest and Ambition, which retard us in our Pursuits, and often baffle the Success of them. Yet these, alas! when most successful, are far from answering the Hope conceiv'd of them. But how much greater would our Mortification be, should a Bliss, which in all Points quadrates with our best and most extensive Wishes, be at once within our View, and beyond our Reach! Should we be tantalized with the Shew of it, and should our Abilities prove too feeble to raise us up to it! Now this in every Part of it might be a Case of Fact, if  
we

we had not infinite *Power* to assist us in our Pursuit after it. This (we have Reason to believe) will be the miserable Fate of those condemn'd Malefactors, who shall see their Brethren in *Abraham's* Bosom, whilst themselves are tormented in unquenchable Flames. With enlarged disappointed Desires, there is Reason, I say, to think, that they will aspire to an Happiness which they shall always see at a Distance, and never be able to approach it nearer. But now an infinite Power shall exert itself in our Favour, and exalt us to the Place where the Light of God's Countenance shall shine upon us without Intermision; *there* we may be sure we shall have our Fill of Happiness, since all Perfection and Fullness dwell there. For,

2dly. Infinite Wisdom knows how to employ an Infinity of Power with all Advantage for our Interests. We, for ourselves, do often mistake the Point of our Happiness; and if the choicest Materials for it were laid before us, and submitted to our Judgment, the Odds would be great against us, that we

should not determine wisely. But as all Things are perfectly naked and open to the Eyes of him with whom we have to do, when *he* is to carve for us, every thing, we may assure ourselves, will be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If in the Frame of our present Being there be any thing defective, any disqualifying Circumstance, which makes us here not meet to be Partakers of a perfect Bliss, he sees our Distemper, and can easily apply a Cure to it. He knows how to renew our Faculties, and can brighten them to a Pitch, which shall enable them to endure the strongest Light. His *Eyes did see our Substance, when 'twas yet imperfect*; he sees it is so still, will see it yet more so in the Dust of Death, and then will perfect it in a blessed Resurrection. For (as we read St. James declaring in the *Acts of the Apostles*) *known unto God are all his Works from the Beginning of the World; neither is there any Creature, which is not manifest in his Sight* (as the Author to the Hebrews informs us.) And again, *Where (saith holy Job) shall Wisdom be found,*  
and

Acts. xv.  
18.

Heb. iv.  
13.

Job xxviii.  
12, 14, 15,  
20, 21, 23.



*and where is the Place of Understanding? The Depth saith, it is not in me, and the Sea saith, it is not with me: It cannot be gotten for Gold, neither shall Silver be weighed for the Price thereof. Whence then cometh Wisdom, seeing it is hid from the Eyes of all living? The Answer is, God understandeth the Way thereof, and he knoweth the Place thereof. And,*

3dly. His Goodness assures us that he will exert these great Perfections in our Favour, so that whatever infinite Wisdom can *contrive*, or infinite Power *do* for us, his infinite Goodness assures us *will* be contriv'd and done for us. The beloved Disciple of his Son hath told us, that *God is Love*; and the *Psalmist* hath John iv. 8. made him this grateful and pious Acknowledgment; *Thou openest (saith he) Psal. clxv. 16. thine Hand, and satisfiest the Desire of every living thing.* If the *Psalmist* had meant this of the *animal* Creation only, and not of the *Rational*, it had been a *Reflection* instead, of an *Acknowledgment*. For the *Rational*, we are sure, enters most and deepest into his Care; and therefore, as the same holy *Psalmist* goes Ibid. 19.

on

on to declare of him, *He will fulfil the Desire of them that fear him.* This, indeed, is not the proper Place for it, where, for other Purposes, wise and gracious, there is a promiscuous Dispensation of Good and Evil. But the Desire of good Men, which is founded in the Mercies and Promises of God, and cleaves inseparably to the Nature of his most faithful Servants, will surely meet *elsewhere* with a full and adequate Satisfaction. To which I will only add in the

4<sup>th</sup> and last Place, That Eternity and Unchangeableness are necessary to finish and complete our Happiness. Were it otherwise to be found in this World, yet the want of these Circumstances would be ruinous and fatal to it: Nay, indeed, the more of it we should meet with *here*, the more insupportable would be the Thought of *ever* parting with it. But now when God shall appear avowedly in our Favour, and make himself

Ecclef. iii. the Portion of our Inheritance, *Whatsoever he doth, it shall be for ever. The*  
 14.  
 Psal. cii. *Heavens and the Earth shall perish, but he*  
 26, 27, 28. *shall*

*shall remain; as a Vesture he shall fold them, and they shall be folded, but he is the same, and his Tears shall have no End. The Children also of his Servants shall continue, and their Seed shall be established before him.*

Let us make now a little Stand upon our present Argument, and observe from it the Difference between our present Possessions and our future Prospects.

Here our Days are of an Hand's-breadth, and we dwell in Houses of Clay, whose Foundation is in the Dust. We are born to Trouble, and all Things in Life are full of Labour. Our Thoughts and Pursuits are very Vanity. We are wearied in the Multitude of our Counsels. We have no Might, neither know we what to do. We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, and even all our Righteousness is as filthy Rags. These are the Declarations of the Spirit of God concerning us; of *that* Spirit who searcheth all Things, even the deep Things of *God*; and therefore we may with all Safety appeal to his Testimony for the Things of *Men*.

But



But *now* that God hath commanded the Light to shine into our Hearts, and hath brought Life and Immortality to Light thro' the Gospel, we know that no Labour shall be in vain in the Lord; that as in *Adam* all die, even so in *Christ* shall all be made alive; that we shall be fashioned like unto his glorious Body, and be as the Angels of God in Heaven; that tho' it doth not appear in full to us, what we *shall* be, yet we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that nothing then shall separate us from the Love and Enjoyment of God, but that he shall be for ever our exceeding great Reward.

This is the scriptural Representation of our present Possessions and of our future Prospects, of what we *have* in this World, and of what we *hope* from another.

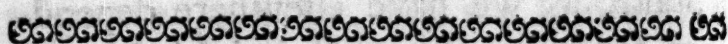
And upon this View of each, where shall we find Words to express our Astonishment at the Guise and Fashion of common Life? at the Preference which in Fact is given to insufficient, uncertain,

and tranſient Advantages, before ſurer, more abiding, and more ſatisfactory Comforts? at the *Anxiety* wherewith we purſue Things *temporal*, and at the *Indolence* wherewith we look upon Things *eternal*? at the Venture we run in making Shipwreck of our Conſciences, upon very conjectural and dubious Hopes of ſucceeding in our worldly Purſuits? and indeed, at the Folly of riſquing ſo great a Stake, as we have elſewhere depending, for even the moſt indubitable Affurances of preſent Good? I ſay, we cannot eaſily find Words to expreſs our Aſtoniſhment at a Conduct ſo prepoſterous, and every way unjuſtifiable: Where the Thing is agreed in *Theory*, and denied in *Practice*; where the *Premiſſes* are granted, and the *Conclusion* is diſputed! But thus, perhaps, it behoves the Man who denies his God to contradict himſelf, and to appear a *Fool*; that *Wickedneſs* and *Absurdity* might be obſerved to go together; and when God ſhall judge the World in Righteouſneſs, that all the Earth might keep Silence before him. *To whom be aſcrib'd, &c.*

S E R M O N



## SERMON IV.



JOB xi. 7.

*Canst thou by searching find out  
God? Canst thou find out the  
Almighty unto Perfection?*



THE Text, tho' propounded only in the way of Query, carries with it all the Force and Reach of the strongest Negative. The Occasion to which it pointed shews us, that the Dealings of God, and the Methods of his *Providence* were meant to be represented by  
it



it as unsearchable; but then the Inference thence is clear and cogent, that his wonderful *Essence*, with the Manner of his Existence must be a good deal less discernible by human Apprehensions. For in the Language of the Context; *It is high as Heaven; what can we do? Deeper than Hell; what can we know? The Measure thereof is longer than the Earth, and broader than the Sea.*

But tho' we have no fit Measure, wherewith to take the exact Heighth, and Depth, and Length and Breadth of it; yet some *partial* Knowledge we have Means of coming at: Tho' the full Body of this Light be too strong and dazling to be encountered by our crazy Organs; yet some Rays of it we may bear and may behold with Pleasure: Tho' with our nicest Researches we can never *find out the Almighty unto Perfection*; yet a serious and prudent Enquiry directed by proper Helps, and bounded within fit Limitations, will let us into all necessary Degrees of Acquaintance with him; will teach us moreover where to stop, and will tell us when we can proceed

no

no farther. And thus, if it will not lead us into all the Truths which might possibly be known concerning him, it will guard against numerous and various Sources of Error. It will help us to think of him *soberly*, when we cannot *accurately*.

In the Sequel of my present Discourse, it shall be my Business to mark out the Boundaries which are set to our Knowledge of God, where our Searches after him *are* likely to be successful, and where they are *not*.

I. *First*, then his Being, his *Eternal Power and Godhead* may be *understood by the Things which are made*. That they made not themselves is as evident, as that both Parts of a Contradiction cannot be true. So that they must have had a Cause existing before them, and able to produce them. That this Cause was a wise one, and this Being a *God of Knowledge*, the whole Fabric of the Universe bears ample Testimony. *The Heavens declare his Glory, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-work. By Wisdom he hath found-*  
ed

*ed the Earth; by Understanding he hath  
 established the Heavens. By his Knowledge* Prov. iii.  
 19, 20.  
*the Depths are broken up; and the Clouds  
 drop down their Dew. His Goodness ap-  
 pears in the Contrivance of every thing  
 for the Use and Convenience of the  
 Creatures he hath made; in opening his* Psal. cxlv.  
 16.  
*Hand and satisfying the Desire of every  
 living thing. Every thing which bears  
 the Signature of his Hand upon it, proves  
 it to be kind and gracious in his original  
 Intent and Purpose concerning it.*

I mean not to pursue this Argument to any Length, but only to point out to you those Footsteps of a First, which may be so easily and surely traced thro' all the Operations of Second Causes; for these all of them carry such apparent Marks of Insufficiency and Dependence, as must naturally lead our Thoughts to a firmer and stronger Foundation. Wherever we cast our Eyes, whether upon *Heaven, which is God's Throne*; or upon *the Earth, which is his Footstool*, we discern such eminent Marks of Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, as unavoidably draws us to that common Center of all Perfection, from which these



smaller Emanations must be supposed to flow; since there could be nothing wise, nothing good, nothing complete or perfect in its kind, without a Cause to give it Birth, and being itself in the last Resort uncaused, and therefore eternal, and therefore furnished with all possible Perfection.

By such Steps as these we come at the Knowledge of God, that there is a Being adorned with infinite Perfection.

In much the same Way, and by Arguments a-kin to these, we become acquainted,

*Secondly*, With his Providence, that he not only made, but sustaineth, preserveth, *upholdeth all things by a Word of his Power.* To infinite *Wisdom* in Conjunction with *Omnipotence*, this Province, howsoever in itself extensive, is perfectly easy; and when we add infinite *Goodness* to them, we conceive not how it should be avoidable. For, can he whose Eyes run to and fro throughout all the Earth, avoid beholding what passeth there? Or can the Creator behold the Things which he hath made with In-  
difference

difference and Neglect? This were a direct Repugnancy to the clearest Perceptions we have of his blessed Attributes. So that the Exercise of his Providence stands confirmed to us by the intrinsic Reason of Things, as well as by the outward and visible Effects of it; and we can as easily conceive him *absent from the World*, as *idle in it*. *He filleth all in all. By him all Things consist.*

Eph. i. 23.

Col. i. 17.

Acts xvii.

28.

*In him we live and move and have our Being.* Reason and Scripture are both concurring in this Representation of him. And from hence it will follow, as a Consequence necessary, certain, and, to such as will attend it, clear and evident, that there must be a Day of Recompence for the Just and Unjust, wherein all the Inequality of his present Dealings will be adjusted with an Exactness, which will not admit of any single Exception to it.

*Natural and revealed Religion* are thus far concurring to enlighten us in our Searches after God. To which Revelation hath,

*Thirdly*, Finally added a more explicit

Directory for the Means of our Acceptance, and open'd to us the Methods he expects to be serv'd in.

That Reason alone *did* not perform this Part for us with any tolerable Sufficiency, is evident in Fact and in undoubted Experience. That it *could* not do this for us in any sufficient Measure, is therefore very probable, because it had passed all sorts of Trial, and was found in all of them lame and defective. The Differences between *moral Good and Evil* it perceived and acknowledged to some Degree; tho' Examples might be given of some Deficiencies even in *this* particular.

But in the Methods of *Reconciliation for Sin*, and in all the *Offices of religious Worship*, it was utterly plunged and bewilder'd till Revelation stepped in to illuminate and aid it.

The Want, however, is now so supplied, and the Complaint is silenced so effectually, that we have no Pretence of Ignorance to plead, in excuse of any Errors which have *here* crept in, or shall hence-forwards be here permitted to creep in, upon us. *We have a Word of Prophecy so sure,*  
that



that if we take heed to it, we shall find it <sup>2 Tim. iii.</sup>  
able to make us wise unto Salvation, thro' <sup>15.</sup>  
Faith which is in Christ Jesus.

If then we will use the Helps within  
our Power, we may acquaint ourselves  
with the Being of a God, with the Ex-  
ercise of his Providence, in the Life  
which now is, as well as in that which is  
to come, and with his Will concerning  
us, in order to our Acceptance, when  
he shall judge the World by Jesus Christ.

These are Things, which if we will  
search, we may find out; thus far we  
may safely go in our Enquiries after God,  
with all imaginable Likelihood of suc-  
ceeding in them, of apprehending, I mean,  
these several Articles with Clearness and  
Distinction, and of discerning them in a  
Light which shall be strong enough to  
direct our Practice.

But how much farther we can go, may  
be much a Question: For,

II. Secondly, In the Philosophy of his Es-  
sence, the Dealings of his Providence, and  
the Manner of his Existence, the Psalmist <sup>Psal. xviii.</sup>  
hath justly (tho' poetically) represented <sup>11.</sup>

him, as *making Darkneſs his ſecret Place,*  
*his Pavilion round about him with dark*  
*Water, and thick Clouds to cover him.*

I. To begin then with the Philoſo-  
 fophy of his *Effence*: To ſay we cannot  
 comprehend it, is only an Appeal to com-  
 mon Senſe and Experience, which aſſure  
 us that we cannot. In Reality the moſt  
 minute and contemptible of created Ef-  
 ſences eſcape our Knowledge, and are  
 ſo far from being found out unto Per-  
 fection, that they ſtill are Secrets to us  
 what we ſee and feel, and taſte and  
 handle, what we moſt intimately, moſt  
 familiarly converſe with, we yet appre-  
 hend no otherwiſe than with a very  
 dark and ſuperficial Knowledge. With  
 the *Properties* of *Matter* our Senſes do  
 indeed acquaint us, that it is hard or  
 ſoft, round or ſquare, black or white, &c.  
 but the Support of theſe Properties, that  
 which makes them to be what they ſe-  
 verally are, its Effence or Subſtance, (a  
*Name* we have given to a *Thing* we un-  
 derſtand not, this) is myſterious ſtill and  
 dark to us, and we are, upon the whole,  
 as little acquainted with it as with the

Nature

Nature of Spirit. Nay, as forward as we may be in searching, and as peremptory as we may be in pronouncing, we do yet for ourselves deliberate, chuse, discourse, and enquire without knowing how, without understanding the Principle by which we perform these several Operations. We *live* without knowing what *Life* is; nay, we reason without understanding what that is which *reasons*. We can say, indeed, what it is *not*; but cannot with any Clearness or Certainty define what it *is*. Thus when the Scriptures confirm to us, what Reason before had dictated, that *God is a Spirit*, the Proposition, so far as we apprehend of it, is purely *negative*; it assures us, that he doth not, like Matter, consist of bodily Parts, cannot be divided or crumbled into different Parcels, or Portions, or Pieces, as Matter can be; and thus much, if we will acquiesce in it, is useful to preserve us from Error, but yet doth not lead us into any *positive* Truth; for still we are a great way off from knowing what *Spirit* is, or what that unsearchable Essence which



we are sure must be, tho' we cannot fully comprehend its *Being*.

2. Even the Dealings of his Providence, tho' evident in their Effects to Sense and to Experience, yet have often puzzled the acutest Enquirers after them. For in the Chain of Events we can discern very few Links only; whereas it is the Contexture of the whole, and the reciprocal Dependence of one Link upon another, from the first to the last of them, which chiefly commends the Curiosity of the Contrivance. So that till our Views are enlarged to a sufficient Compass for taking in the whole and intire Prospect, and for disentangling these several Links from their mutual Implications, we can never judge upon the main Design, can neither discern the Beauties, nor unravel the various Intricacies and Difficulties of so involved a Scheme. Mean while the *general* Answer, should here, I think, suffice, where none can be given, which is more *particular*; that there remains in another Life a Prospect to be opened, which like the last Act in a well-wrought Tragedy, shall adjust to  
the

the Satisfaction of each Spectator, whatever may have appeared irregular, or unaccountable, in the several Parts of the preceding *Drama*; that whatever may seem in other Respects unaccountable, hath this plain View to be served by its being so, that a future State is thereby assured to us; and then whatever secures to us that great Issue, doth fully compensate for any Doubts or Perplexities of a lower Nature, wherewith it may otherwise incidentally entangle us. So that although with regard to our Apprehensions of God and of his Dealings with us in our present State, *Clouds and Darknes* are justly said to be *round about him*; yet we may be sure in the Conclusion, that *Righteousness and Judgment* will appear to have been ever the *Habitation of his Seat*.

3. In the Manner of his Existence there are Heights and Depths of *sundry* Kinds, which, with all the Helps afforded us from *human Reason* and *divine Revelation* do yet remain unfathomable.

I will instance in two Particulars; the *one* whereof is to some Degree discoverable

able by *human Reason*; whilst the Knowledge we have of the *other* is purely owing to *Divine Revelation*.

(1.) Then our own Reason assures us in the strongest Terms that something or other must needs have been eternal. Run back as far as you will, your Thoughts must come at last to a Stand, and you must fix upon some Original, some Beginning, some Cause of Things which had nothing before, nothing prior to it. Thus far your Notion is clear enough, and you understand yourself, whilst you affirm and assert it. But if you pursue it a little farther, you will presently be plunged. For when you come to consider the *Modus* of *Eternity*, and the Manner of Existence in a Being which hath been from Everlasting, your Reason will sink under you, and will be lost in the Abyss of such a profound Enquiry. Since you must conceive this Eternity, either *without* a Succession of Time, or *with* it. One, or other of these Ways is absolutely necessary. And yet the *one* looks very much like a Contradiction,



diction, whilst the *other* is mere unintelligible Jargon.

For to talk in the Language of the Schoolmen of a permanent Eternity, an *infinite Now*, as if God co-existed, or existed together with all the several Parts and Successions of Time, *past* and *future*, as well as the *present* Moment; as if his being were equally and universally spread over all the possible Periods of Duration, and nothing to him were *past* or *future*, but all were in like manner, and ever *present* with him, in a Sense peculiar to the boundless Nature of his incomprehensible Being; for ought I can object against it, may possibly be true; but yet most sure I am, that it is utterly *unintelligible*.

On the other Hand, the *Succession* of Time, by different Parts and Portions of Hours, or Days, or Years, or any equivalent Measures of it, are ne'er a whit more conceivable in an eternal Duration. For if an Infinity of *Years* or of Duration be now past and gone, some Period of Time must needs be assignable, wherein each of them *once* was

was *present*, and so had a *Beginning*; which is a flat *Contradiction*, to the Nature and the Notion of Eternity. Yet either *this seeming Contradiction*, or the other unintelligible Notion is the only way we have of conceiving any Cause or Being, which hath existed from Everlasting. Now, in the *one* or *other* of these Ways (*both unintelligible, both inconceivable*) there is a Necessity of acknowledging somewhat to have always existed. Our Reason starts this Difficulty to us, and leaves us in the midst of it; which methinks should the more easily reconcile us to *another Difficulty* in the *Manner* of God's Existence, as represented to us from *Divine Revelation*, and this comes,

(2.) Next in Order to be spoke to. For As in the *former* Instance our Reason assures us of an *eternal* Being, but helps us to no fit Lights nor Mediums, for conceiving the Manner of an *eternal Duration*; so in the Doctrine of this Day\*, and in those *eminent Distinctions* which the Scriptures have asserted in the Deity between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we know neither the *Principle*

\* This Sermon was preached on *Trinity Sunday*.

which

which so diversifies them, nor upon what those several *Relations* are founded, nor what is the *Manner* of their *distinct Subsistence*.

By going too far out of our Depth, where the Line of *Reason and Scripture* fails us; by peremptory Decisions of what they are, or *are not*, where we have no sufficient Light to direct us in either Determination, most of those Mischiefs have arisen, wherewith the Church of *Christ* hath been often and long infested upon this mysterious Article.

Every Man, I think, who is called to the Office of a Teacher in it, may be allowed to bear his publick Testimony for this much-disputed Doctrine, with as little personal Reproach as may be upon such as differ from him.

I shall follow, for my own Part, the Clue of Scripture, as far as it will lead me, and shall stop where it will warrant me to proceed no farther.

Now that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are named in Scripture is past all doubt.

That they are there also distinguish'd from



from each other, so that the *Father* is not the *Son*, nor the *Son* the *Father*, nor the *Holy Ghost* or *Spirit* the *one* or the *other*, the very Names themselves do in common Sense and Construction strongly and clearly prove to us.

That personal *Properties* are ascribed in holy Writ to each of them as thus distinguish'd from one another; that the Scriptures speak of them as we are wont to speak of different Persons, the different Offices, and Characters under which they are severally represented, do abundantly confirm to us. For *sending* and *being sent*; *teaching*, *witnessing*, *reminding*, *comforting*, are personal Offices, and among Men the Badges of *personal Distinction*.

That each of these thus personally distinguish'd from one another, hath the *Name*, the *Office*, the *Attributes* of God, ascribed to him in the Gospel, let those Passages bear Witness, which tell us, Jo. i. 1, 2, 3, 14. that the *Word which was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us* was in the *Beginning with God* and was *God*, and that *all Things were made by him*; that the *Spi-*  
rit

rit of God is immense, and no Place is free from him; as the Psalmist strongly intimates in that pious Query, *whither shall I go from thy Spirit?* That he is an <sup>7.</sup> eternal Spirit, as the Epistle to the Hebrews <sup>Heb. ix.</sup> expressly styles him; that he *searcheth all* <sup>14.</sup> Things, even the deep Things of God, as St. Paul asserts of him, that he is inti- <sup>1 Cor. ii.</sup> mately present to all our Minds, as he <sup>10.</sup> must be, if he discerns our several Wants and *helps* our manifold *Infirmities*.

Add to this, that we are baptized unto the Name of each, and have Blessings represented as flowing down from each <sup>1 Tim. i.</sup> of them. <sup>2.</sup>

These Things are clear and evident <sup>2 Cor. xiii.</sup> in Holy Writ. And where then at last <sup>14.</sup> can be the Mischief or Impropriety of calling those *Persons*, to whom *personal Characters* are so manifestly attributed; or addressing to him as God, who is *every where*, in the *Heaven above*, and in the *Hell beneath*, who is *Eternal*, who *knoweth* all things, and *made all things*; who showers down his Blessings on us, and unto whose Name we are commanded to be baptized?

Whilst

Indeed whilst we maintain the Unity of the Godhead, and yet assert the Godhead of more *Persons* than one; we must acknowledge the Term *Person* to be figurative and borrowed; and the only Reason we can give for thus applying it, is what hath been already mentioned; *viz.* That our Language doth not furnish us with any better or fitter Appellation, or which comes nearer to the Sense we conceive delivered to us in the holy Scriptures, since *personal Offices, Acts, and Characters* are there ascribed most plainly and undeniably to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The two first of which, I observe by the way, tho' the Words are Scriptural, must have a *figurative* Meaning, and do not convey to us precisely the same Idea which *Father* and *Son* do in human Generations.

Except then we knew the just and proper Ground of Distinction between them, what it is which constitutes the *Paternity* of the *Father*, or the *Filiation* of the *Son*, we must be content with Terms which are not exactly accurate, and do  
not



not explain to us the particular Manner of their distinct Subsistence.

Let such as charge this Account with the want of any Sense or Meaning to it, (let them, I say) if they can, resolve the Difficulties which have been mentioned as cleaving to any possible Account of an everlasting Existence, which had no Beginning. And when they have done the one, I will undertake the same Art may silence all Objections to the other.

But now, if Things which *Reason* represents as *certain* be utterly *inexplicable* in the Manner of their Existence, the same Privilege and Protection may with all *Reason* be pleaded for the Truths of *Revelation*, and both will stand or fall by one and the same Scrutiny.

If they who are displeased with the Direction of our Worship to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, would truly agree with us in the scriptural Account of this Doctrine, *viz.* That they are distinguished from each other, as we are wont to distinguish Persons, and that each of these personal Distinctions (whatsoever be the just and proper Foundation of

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them,

them, which we confess unknown to us, if they would agree, I say, with us, as I think they must do) that each of these Persons hath divine *Offices, Acts,* and consequently *Honours* ascribed to him in the Book of God, their Controversy with us might come, I should imagine, to a very short Issue. For, as to *proper* and *improper* Worship, I have never yet heard any scriptural Grounds for such a Distinction; and have great Reason to believe, that no such Distinction could ever be meant in the Gospel Scheme, which had it so much in view to demolish all Pretensions for *Creature-Worship*.

We need, however, no Labour to convince us, that the *Son (as such)* is inferior to the *Father*, nor that the *Holy Ghost*, who is said to proceed from the *one* and to be sent by the *other*, is *inferior* to *both* of them under that OEconomy.

But whatever (I say) be the Ground of those Distinctions, by which one is *Father* and the other *Son*, and in which the main Pinch of the Mystery doth at last consist; the scriptural Account must remain unbroken,

unbroken, which makes them both Partakers in Divine Offices, Acts, and Honours, and yet asserts the *Unity* of the *Godhead*.

This confessed Subordination of *Son* to *Father*, in their mutual Relation to each other, should be allowed methinks as an Answer to that and like Texts of Scripture, which represent the *Father* as *greater than the Son*: And when it is moreover consider'd that this Son was the *Word made Flesh*, which *dwelt among us*, many other Marks of his Inferiority, might well be placed to the Account of his Manhood, and of the innocent Infirmities cleaving to it.

What is pleaded upon this Argument from the Records of the Primitive Church, hath doubtless great Value due to it, as the best Comment upon Holy Writ.

But they who are best acquainted with the Genius and Manner of those venerable Remains, will agree, I am persuaded, with me, that the *earliest* Authors are very concise and short, have very few (and those only incidental) Occasions of mentioning, or discussing the



Subject of our present Argument; that scarce any of them did particularly or professedly point to it, till *Noetus* and *Praxeas*, and after them *Sabellius*, had confounded all *personal Distinctions* between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And it was then, indeed, no more nor other than what might reasonably be feared from human Infirmary, that such as opposed them in the Heat of Disputation should seem to favour their opposite Error, the Dangers of which were at that Time unforeseen by them, and so should give Countenance to the Opinions espoused afterwards by *Arius*; which, upon due Consideration, I am well persuaded, will account for any Passages seeming to have that Tendency in some Writers of the third Century.

This is a Circumstance upon which a great Stress should, I think, be laid, in the Controversy which of late hath been so much agitated.

For hence it appears, that the whole Stream of the earliest Fathers run all in favour of our blessed Lord's Divinity, according to the strictest and most pro-

per Sense of it. They so expressed themselves, it seems, concerning it, that they were thought to mean nothing less nor other of him, than that he was the very God and Father of the Universe, without any real Distinction between them.

Had not this been the general Tenor of their Language, they could never have been misconstrued, as confounding the *Son* with the *Person* of the *Father*.

Yet it is remarkable of *Tertullian* particularly, that whilst he opposed this Error, in his Treatise against *Praxeas*, he guarded well against its opposite Extreme, and so maintained the *Distinction* of *Persons*, as clearly to assert the *Unity* of their *Substance*.

But it is Time I should have done with this knotty Argument, which I am sensible cannot reach all in a mix'd Congregation.

Of late it hath been so much, and so licenciously debated, that I could not excuse myself without touching thus far upon it, when the Season and the Occasion seemed to demand it.

The Moral of the whole will, however, convey this useful Lesson to all who enter upon these Researches; that in the *Things of God*, the *Spirit of God* should be their chief Direction; that in thinking or speaking of him they should keep as closely as they can to the Letter and the Tenor of his own Language; that all Consequences deduced from it must be so much the more uncertain, as they are more remote from it; in fine, that they should *cast down Imaginations and every high thing which exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ.*

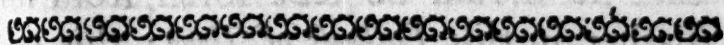
And may the Father of Lights, who sent down his Spirit upon his Church, enlighten by him the Eyes of our Understanding, and lead us into all necessary Truth, for *Jesus Christ's Sake. To whom, &c.*

S E R M O N





## SERMON V.



GALATIANS iv. 4.

*But when the fullness of the Time  
was come, God sent forth his Son.*



**O**F all the manifold Circumstances attending our Redemption, and the various Topicks of Discourse arising from that fruitful Argument; there is none, I think, which hath been less considered or insisted on, than the particular Season which was singled out for the Execution of that great Design.

H 4

This

This is therefore the Circumstance whereupon I would fix for the Subject of your present Meditations. This *fullness of Time*, or the Expiration of that Period, which was intended for the Continuance both of *Jews* and *Gentiles* under their respective OEconomies; I say, the Fitness of *this* rather than of any *other* Juncture, for the Appearance of *Christ* amongst us; the Expediency there was that he should be sent forth from his Father in this *Fullness of Time*; this critical Season is the Point which I would illustrate in the Sequel of my present Discourse.

And I would endeavour to do it from the following Topicks.

I. That the Prophecies concerning our Saviour's Coming were at this Time accomplished.

II. That sufficient Trial had been made of other Methods, and of what human Reason could do without him.

III. That both the *Jewish* and *Gentile* Religion stood then in very great Need of a Reformation.

IV. That

IV. That the Diffusion of the Gospel was in *that* Juncture more practicable than in any *other*.

I. *First*, I say, the Prophecies concerning our Saviour's Coming were accomplished at the Time wherein he was sent forth amongst us.

The *Prediction* of the Prophets was founded, indeed, upon the *future Truth* of those Events which they predicted. So that those Events did not, in Strictness, come to pass *because* they were predicted; but they were therefore predicted, because they were afterwards to come to pass. Yet when the Spirit of God had prophesied concerning them, there was thence an *After-Necessity*, that what had so been foretold should punctually be fulfilled. The Original *Reason* of the Event had a Being *before* the *Prophecy* of it; but when once it *had* been prophesied, the Truth of God obliged him to the Performance of what his Wisdom had before decreed and *predicted*.

Thus the Scriptures in their most obvious



Mat. ii. 15. vious Sense bear Testimony, that divers  
 viii. 17. Events of Consequence come to pass, *that*  
 xii. 17. *it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the*  
 xiii. 35. *Prophet concerning them. St. Matthew*  
 xxi. 4. *hath expressly told us, All this was done,*  
 Mat. xxi. *that it might be fulfilled which was spoken*  
 4. *by the Prophet. And our Saviour himself,*  
 in his Expostulation with the *Jews* for  
 their tumultuous Assault upon his sa-  
 cred Person, was content, we find, to  
 Mark xiv. put it upon this Foot, that the *Scriptures*  
 49. *must be fulfilled.* And after that the Pro-  
 phets had spoken it, he propounds this  
 Luke xxiv. Question to his Disciples, *Ought not*  
 25, 26. *Christ to have suffered these Things, and*  
*to enter into his Glory?* Now, although  
 it be true that these several Events were  
 therefore *predicted*, because the Wisdom of  
 God thought them fit to be *accomplish'd*;  
 yet *after* they were *predicted*, his *Truth*,  
 I say, stood obliged moreover to see them  
*accomplished.* And therefore one Reason  
 of their Accomplishment, tho' secondary,  
 'tis confessed, and subordinate, yet was  
 really and truly their having been *pre-*  
*dicted.*  
 So that there is no Necessity of resort-  
 ing

ing here to the common Solution, nor of saying in every Instance (tho' in some Examples it may be fit to say so) that such Prophecies were eventually fulfilled, when the Matters contained in them were in Fact come to pass; but we may justly say, according to the plain Letter of the Evangelist's Language, that those Matters were *accomplished* for this, among other and prior Reasons, that the *Prophecy* concerning them *might be fulfilled*.

But now if our Saviour had not appeared in our Flesh, at, or about the Time, when he did appear in it; there had been an apparent Failure in the Prophecy, which had promised to *Judah*, Gen. xlix. 10. that *the Scepter should not depart from him, nor a Lawgiver from between his Feet until Shiloh came, to whom the gathering of the People should be.* Some Face of Government and Polity there was with that People, till the Destruction of *Jerusalem*; but ever since apparently there hath been a Failure of it. So that the Prophecy itself had been disparaged, if *Shiloh* had not come before that Period:  
And

And if our Saviour was not that *Shiloh*; to whom the *gathering of the Nations should be*, there hath no one since appear'd, who could with any Propriety sustain the Character.

Haggai ii. 7, 9. Thus again; when the Prophet *Haggai* had foretold that the *Desire of all Nations should come, and should fill the second Temple with Glory; that the Glory of that latter House should be greater than of the former, and that the Lord of Hosts would give Peace in it*, it was all along understood, that his Prophecy would fail of its due Accomplishment, if the Prince of Peace did not honour that Temple with his Presence, wherein alone it could be said to exceed the Glory of the former.

Dan. ix. 24, 26. Once more; it is confessed that *Daniel's Seventy Weeks* have long since expired, from whatsoever *Æra* you would chuse to date them: And yet it was necessary to the Truth of his Prediction, that the *most Holy should be anointed, and that the Messiah should be cut off in one of them*. If therefore our Saviour had not long since appeared, the Prediction would have



have lost its Credit; and what was spoken by the Prophet would not have been fulfilled. The entire Destruction of the *Jewish* Polity and Government was the apparent Boundary to all these Prophecies; within which Period there was therefore a Necessity that they should be all accomplish'd.

Our Saviour did in Fact appear a little before the final Ruin of that obstinate People. Themselves cannot deny, that about that Time there did appear a Person with those Pretensions, and that he wrought many mighty Works in Proof of them: They cannot deny that great Expectations were at that Time raised upon the Credit of the Prophecies just now recited: They have nothing to say, but that the Performance of God's Promises hath been protracted beyond the Time decreed for it, in Punishment of their Sins; not remembering that one great Design of the *Messiah's* Appearance, was to be *wounded for their* Isa. liii. 5. *Transgressions*; and the greater their Sin, the more it stood in need of such a Cure for it. They forget all this while their greatest

greatest Sin, their crucifying the Lord of Glory, which hath drawn down upon them such a national Punishment as is utterly unexampled in any History: To be Fugitives and Vagabonds over the Face of the whole Earth, without a settled Government any where; and yet to preserve a Name, the Stench of which follows them thro' all Nations and Languages wherever they sojourn.

But I proceed to observe

II. *Secondly*, That when God sent forth his Son to dwell amongst us, and to instruct us in his Will; sufficient Tryal had been made of other Methods, and of what human Reason could do without him.

What was the Efficacy of an unwritten Law, of what Force to keep Men within the Rule of Duty, had been thoroughly experimented under the Patriarchal State; and yet when oral Traditions could so easily be handed down from Father to Son, during the Longevity of Men in those earlier Ages, we read how soon the true Worshippers of God were diminish'd in their Numbers,  
and

and reduced upon the Matter to one or two Families; so that when the Interests of Religion were brought into this narrow Compass, it seemed expedient to the Wisdom of God to confine thenceforwards its few remaining Votaries within the Limitations of a written Law, at once to instruct them in the Measures of their Duty, to guard against their Excursions from it, and to prepare them gradually for a fuller Revelation. Thus were the *Jews* tied down to the Discipline of various Ordinances, suited for the Time to their Genius and Circumstances, and to the Posture of Things and Persons about them.

The *Gentiles* all this while were suffered to walk on in the Darkness which themselves had chosen when they forsook the true God, and resorted to the Worship of dumb Idols instead of him. If now at the very first Instant of their sinking into this lamentable State of Ignorance and Error, the Son of God had been sent to reclaim them; it might not have enough appeared, that human Reason was of it self too feeble to have  
drawn



drawn them out of their dark and forlorn Condition. At a Time and Juncture so disadvantageous to it, no Measures could well or fairly have been taken of its Weakness or its Strength. We could never have insisted, that it had been put upon a fair Tryal, had it only been tried at its lowest Ebb.

Improvements in Life and Knowledge came in but slowly; the first Dawnings of Knowledge opened upon Inventions relating to the Necessaries of Life; and our earliest Accounts of human Learning prove it to have consisted rather of *Tradition* and *Remembrance*, than of *Philosophical Speculations* or of *artful Reasonings*: So that when the *Remembrance* of the true God was once lost and erased out of the Minds of Men; the Nature of the Thing made a long Tryal necessary, to see whether human Art and Industry could ever have recover'd it: For human Art and Industry proceeded by such slow Advances, that no Man could tell what might be expected from them, till the Experience of many Ages had wrought them up gradually to their just Perfection.

Perfection. A dark Period was no fitter Illustration of their Power, than the Age of Minority will be allowed to prove the Strength or Wisdom of any single Man: So that if our Saviour had been sent amongst us, either long *before*, or long *after*, the Days of *Augustus Caesar*, one of these two Inconveniences must have ensued upon his *earlier* or *later* Appearance: *viz.* That the *earlier* would have left us no sufficient Conviction, that we could not have found the true God without him; since, after so much Experience of our own Weakness and Disability, we are scarce even *now* prevailed with to acknowledge the Necessity of a divine Revelation for teaching us the Will of God. On the other Hand, a *later* Appearance would not have found Mankind in so good a Preparation to discuss the Credentials of our Saviour's Commission, nor to examine the Truth and Authority of his Powers: Had it been delayed for five hundred Years longer, by that Time we know there was a Relapse into the old State of Blindness; and the Charge of

Imposture would have founded more plausibly, when so few were Judges, or knew how to distinguish a *counterfeit* from a *just* Pretension. But now in that critical Season when our Saviour *did* appear, all Circumstances were concurring to prove it the very fittest. Human Reason had been tried in all the various Shapes and Forms of it; *and* it was never wrought up to a greater Degree of Delicacy and Politeness than in that nice Conjunction, when the Wisdom of God thought fit to expose the Foolishness of human Wisdom. It could not then be pretended, that human Reason had been put to no Tryal, when Tryal was made of it in its utmost Strength. It could not then be said, that Mankind was surprized into any favourable Acknowledgements of the Christian Religion, when it stood the Tryal of the fiercest Oppositions, of the acutest Judgments, and of the warmest Disputes against it. It could not then be suggested, that the Miracles of *Christ* and his Apostles were done in a Corner, or huddled up in the Dark, when they  
were



were all performed in an Age of the clearest Light, some of them upon the most famous Theatre the World ever knew; and when the Notices of them, and the Appeals made to them, might so easily be transmitted from one Country to another. " Our Saviour (saith " \* *Tertullian*) did not propound his " Scheme in an Age of Ignorance and " Barbarity, nor endeavour to tame the " Wildness of his Converts Manners by " possessing them with the Notion of " numberless Deities to be appeased by " them, as *Numa* did among the *Romans*; but he propounded it in an " Age of Light and Knowledge for the " Benefit of those who were blinded by " their own Conceit, misled by a false " and delusive Light, and deceived with a " pompous Shew of Delicacy and Politeness."

Let us therefore examine in the next Place, whether, when human Reason had such great Advantages for enabling it to exert it self with Efficacy and

\* *Tertull. Apolog. cap. 21.*

Power, the Success was in any Measure answerable: So far from this, that I observe,

III. *Thirdly*, Both of the *Jewish* and *Gentile* Religion at the Time of our Saviour's Appearance, that they stood very much in need of a Reformation.

Among the *Jews* the Life and Spirit of Religion were entirely choaked in outward Forms and in ceremonious Observances. They had smarted so severely for their past Idolatry, that they fancied they could never get at too great a Distance from it; and therefore ran headlong into an opposite Extreme of the wildest Superstition. They had quite reversed the just Order of religious Duties, by preferring Sacrifice before Mercy, and a few little Observances before the eternal Laws of Righteousness and Truth. And the Spirit wherein our Saviour found them, disposed them rather to proceed in this preposterous Course, than to alter the least Step in it; the *Pharisees*, who received their Denomination from their Preciseness in these Matters,

Matters, being the most popular and leading Sect with that deluded People. They had therefore, for many Centuries been taught by a Schoolmaster, under whom they apparently made very small Improvements; and were rather going backwards than advancing, when an Offer was made to take them out of his Hands and to put them into better.

The Case of the *Gentiles* was still more deplorable: What Advances they made in the other Parts of Knowledge contributed very little to their Improvements in Religion: Quite contrary, their *Superstition* seems to have increased with their *Learning*, and every fresh Discovery entituled its Author to religious Addresses. Thus the true God was lost in a Crowd of false ones; and his Worship was corrupted, as the Vices of those who rivalled him gave the Occasion of debauching it with improper Mixtures.

Never were the most impure Superstitions at a greater Height, than when the Son of God was sent to reclaim Men from them. Never was the Worship of



God so loaded with foreign Observances, so misguided in its Object, and so corrupt in every Part of it, as when our Saviour came with this Message from  
 Joh. iv. 24. Heaven, that God was a *Spirit*, and would thenceforwards *be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth*. Never were so many unworthy Partners admitted to share with the true God in his proper Honours, as when he proclaimed his Unity by his Spirit, which *searcheth all Things even the deep Things of God*.  
 1 Cor. i. 19.

Wherefore, when the Face of Religion was so universally deformed and monstrous; when it plainly appeared that, if left to itself, it was never likely to be otherwise; when the most promising Helps for cleansing and curing it, did rather increase its Deformity, and assist in spreading the foul Contagion; then, I say, if ever, was the proper Season for Omnipotence to step in to the Rescue of bewilder'd and lost Mankind; then was the Benefit of that heavenly Aid the greatest, when the Necessity of it was prov'd to be so; when the Philosophy of the Gentiles appeared a mere *Wisdom of*  
 1 Cor. i. 17.

of Words, a mere speculative Amusement, and therefore (as the Apostle very justly called it) a *vain Deceit*; when Superstition got Ground apparently, both among *Jews* and *Gentiles*, of any feeble Endeavours which were used to suppress it: Then, I say, was the proper Juncture for the *Sun of Righteousness* to arise, and to disperse these Clouds of Darkness, which no other Power but his could dissipate; to break forth with his Light in the midst of this great Obscurity, and to discover the *Path of Life* which lay hid, as yet, in the *Valley of the Shadow of Death*. Col. ii. 8.

IV. *Fourthly*, and finally, to the preceding Circumstances of this critical Juncture, I beseech you suffer me to add, one farther Mark of its peculiar Fitness, That the Diffusion of the Gospel was then more practicable than it could naturally have been in any other.

In the Exercise of his Providence, God hath not indeed, tied himself down to human Means, nor to natural Causes; but yet he doth not chuse to break in

upon them, if his Purposes can be answered without offering them Violence.

No Season therefore could be so fit for the Appearance of a Teacher sent from God, as that, wherein his Instructions might be most generally diffused and most easily transmitted from one Part to another. The *Roman* Empire was then either in or near its Height, when our Saviour came into the World upon this important Design; and it continued to flourish, and even to extend itself still more widely during the Season, wherein the Interests of the Gospel were most successfully laboured. This Circumstance did, in Course, facilitate its Progress, and open'd a Door to its Reception, whilst so large a Part of the Earth was under one Government, whilst a Communication between different Countries was by these Means kept open, and whilst a Correspondence was thus maintained between very distant Nations.

For hence what was done in one Place, was easily known in another. Hence they who laboured in the Work  
of



of the Ministry, had the Means of acting with Concert in their respective Charges. Hence their Access was not entirely precluded, when they travelled from Place to Place, publishing as they went, the glad Tidings of the Gospel. It is evident, that Men were left a good deal to their own Liberty in their Acceptance or Refusal of it: Miracles were wrought, indeed, to convince them; but it was still in their Power to reject or to embrace the Conviction arising from them. *They could not have heard without a Preacher*; and if no Door had been <sup>Rom. x.</sup> <sup>14.</sup> open to the Preacher's Admission, there must have been previous Miracles necessary to have gained it, or else the Preacher could not have come at them.

Fact itself is no inconsiderable Voucher to the Truth and Justice of this Remark; since the Boundaries of the *Roman Empire* have really terminated, for the main, the Progress of the Gospel. And tho' the Sound thereof may have reached somewhat farther; yet the Event hath been, that it hath not been received much farther; but the Converts to the one, have

have generally been the Subjects of the other.

*The People of the Prince who should*  
 Dan. ix. 26. *come (in the Prophet Daniel) were mani-*  
*festly the Romans, who were to destroy*  
*the City and the Sanctuary; the Messiah*  
*was the Prince of that People, he had ad-*  
*opted them into his Church and Family,*  
*and they were to be thenceforwards his*  
*peculiar People.*

This, indeed, lets us into a very dark Scene of Providence, and starts a Difficulty which hath been ever and anon objected against the Christian Revelation;  
 “ That it is not universal; that all Times  
 “ and Places have not reaped the Bene-  
 “ fit of it; that many Ages of the World  
 “ were entirely without it, and that  
 “ many Parts of it still are so.”

I will not pretend to give a full Account of this Matter, nor be ashamed of not resolving what, as yet, is unknown to us in the secret Counsels of an All-wise Providence: Yet somewhat, I conceive, may here be offered in Abatement of the Difficulty, though we cannot entirely nor fully clear it.

1<sup>st</sup>. Then

1st. Then, I desire it may be considered, that the Expiation made by our Saviour for the Sins of the World, was one great Reason of his being sent into it. A Messenger perhaps of less Note and Figure, might have served for the Conveyance of God's Will to Man. It was not necessary that the *Brightness of the Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person*, should have come on Purpose from Heaven, merely to tell us in what Way we should serve him. When he came indeed upon another and higher View, this fell in well enough as a secondary Reason; and when all Seasons were for the *former* Purpose alike and indifferent, might determine the Juncture to the Time which best served the *latter*.

To the *former* Purpose of his attoning for our Sins, all Seasons, or any were equally, I say, significant; since all Men might be in a Capacity to reap the Benefit, where a few only, in the Comparison, could have the Notice. Now since *Christ was not often to suffer from the Foundation of the World*, it was no great Matter in what particular Period of its Continuance

Heb. i. 3.

Heb. ix.

26.



Heb. ix.  
26.

tinuance he was to suffer: Since he was to appear but *once for putting away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself*; other Reasons might well determine the Choice of the Time, when in particular he should offer this Sacrifice: Since the personal Knowledge of his Example was necessarily limited to some one Age of the World; the Circumstances already assigned to the Age wherein he *did* exhibit it, are Reasons, I conceive, sufficient for his Preference of *that* before any *other*.

But if yet it should be insisted, that all Ages and Persons seem equally intitled to the Records of his Example, and to the written Knowledge of his Will; I desire it may be considered in the

2. *Second Place*, that this is a Difficulty which bears as hard upon *natural*, as it doth upon *revealed* Religion; since outward Opportunities are not, and cannot be, to all Men equal. One Man is formed of better Clay than another, with better Dispositions, as well as with better Opportunities. And must the Wisdom or Goodness of God be at every turn arraigned

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raigned for this unavoidable Diversity?  
Shall the *Clay* be permitted to *say to the*  
*Potter, or the Thing formed, unto him that*  
*formed it, why hast thou made me thus?*

Rom. ix.  
20, 21.

As well might the *brutal* Part of the  
Creation repine at the superior Advan-  
tages of the *human*; and the *human* for  
the same Reason murmur, that it was not  
made *Angelical*.

This is therefore a Cavil, which is  
in its Consequences so very extensive,  
that the Objection dissolves its own  
Strength by reaching too far, and by  
putting itself too forward: Since the  
whole Creation may quarrel with the  
great Creator with the same Modesty,  
and upon the Foot of the same wild Prin-  
ciples. But if we will acknowledge no  
Blessing till it becomes universal, we  
shall deserve no Pity when we suffer from  
the want of it.

Mean while it will better become us  
to adore, than censure the secret Coun-  
sels of Divine Providence; to enjoy and  
improve with Thankfulness the Advan-  
tages vouchsafed us, and to remember  
that they who want them have no Ac-

count to give of them; that whatever we enjoy of *peculiar Privilege* hath a *peculiar Duty* to be set in the Scale against it; which adjusts the *seeming Diversity*, to some *proportionable Equality*.

Eph. i. 3. However, since it hath pleased the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to bless us with all spiritual Blessings in heavenly Things, through Christ; we can never be too thankful for the singular Vouchsafement, nor too careful in applying it to its intended Use; as always remembring, that the *End of our Faith*  
 1 Pet. i. 9. *is the Salvation of our Souls*, and that we  
 John xiii. are only happy in knowing these Things, if  
 17. we do them likewise.

Which that we may all know, and do, and be, God of his infinite Mercy grant thro' the Merits of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

*To whom, with the Father, &c.*

SERMON





# S E R M O N VI.



PSALM lxxi. 6.

*By thee have I been holded up from  
the Womb; thou art he that took  
me out of my Mother's Bowels:  
My Praise shall be continually of  
thee.*

Or, as it stands in the 5th Verse of our  
Psalter thus, with a very small Variation.

*Through thee have I been holden up  
ever since I was born; thou art  
he that took me out of my Mo-  
ther's Womb: My Praise shall  
be always of thee.*

THE



THE whole Composition and Tenor of this Psalm speak its holy Author to have been struggling with some sore and pinching Calamity. It is generally ascribed to *David*, upon the unhappy Occasion of his Son *Abalom's* Rebellion, when the good King was in the Decline of Life, and his Spirit less able than formerly to bear up under the Pressure of any weighty Burden. Yet even in the midst of those bitter Sorrows which pierced his Heart, the Comforts of Religion refresh'd his Soul. The Resources he had so often derived from a steady Dependence upon the Aids of Providence, forsook him not now in his great Extremity. But the Remembrance of *past* served him as a Pledge and Earnest of *future* Favours; and the *sure Mercies* of David seem in this trying Juncture to have been *as sure* as ever to him. Wherefore amidst the most feeling Complaints upon his present Distress, he forgot not his Acknowledgments of Praise for a continued Thread and

and Series of manifold and various Blessings; and so seasonably intermixed his *Prayers* with his *Thanksgivings*, that his Gratitude express'd in the *one*, contributed much to the Support of his Hope from the *other*.

God had often heretofore *delivered* him, and therefore he trusted, that he would *yet deliver* him. The whole Psalm (as I have hinted to you) contains a beautiful Intermixture of *Prayers* with *Praises*; of comfortable *Expectations* founded upon favourable *Experiences*: The Sum of these latter my Text hath given us; as either strongly implying, or directly asserting the three following Particulars;

I. That we owe our Birth and Being to God as the original Cause of them: *Thou art he that took me out of my Mother's Womb.*

II. That it is his Providence, which sustains, preserves, and *holds up our Goings in Life*: *Thro' thee have I been holden up ever since I was born.* Thus far we have direct and peremptory Assertions. And,

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III. As



III. As my Text is a brief Summary of what is more at large acknowledged in the Body of the Psalm; the Words last cited may be well allowed to imply a providential Direction and Disposal of such Events as concern us. For to hold up and sustain us, may as properly relate to the great *Issues* of Life, as to *Life itself*, which the holy Psalmist most evidently ascribes to God's Governance in the 18th Verse: *O, what great Troubles and Adversities hast thou shewed me! And yet didst thou turn and refresh me, yea, and broughtest me from the Deep of the Earth again.* And as he goes on at the 19th, *Thou hast brought me to great Honour, and comforted me on every Side.*

The proper Conclusions hence resulting are hinted to us in the Close of my Text: For these, and for all thy Benefits, *my Praise shall be continually of thee.*

I begin with the

I. *First* of these Particulars, That our Birth and Being are owing to God, as the original Cause of them.

When

When we have searched as far as we are able into the Methods of Nature, and traced with our utmost Skill the Process of those *Secondary* Causes, which are the stated Rules she is directed to proceed by; we shall find we cannot long keep up with her, much less pursue her thro' all the Wonders of her manifold Operations; nor indeed account for all Appearances in any one of them; for Example, How the Parts of dead and inanimate Matter cleave to each other; what is the Cement which holds them together; what it is which diversifies the several Sorts of it, and fits them for the various Uses to which they respectively minister, are Secrets yet to the most diligent Enquirers. Even that great Law of mutual Attraction (by which all Parcels of Matter \* incline towards each other proportionally to the real Quantity contained in each of them) tho' it hath given us a Key for opening many Difficulties, and hath entertained us with a beautiful Scene of

\* See Sir Isaac Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*.

various and fine Discoveries, yet wants itself a Key to open the great Difficulty *why* it is so, or what is at last the Reason of this mutual Attraction, which is truly referable to no other Cause, than the Will of the Creator, which hath so appointed it, and fix'd it as a Law for the whole Mass of bodily Substance.

In the *vegetable* World, were we to take the Compass of Solomon's Observations, *from the Cedar-tree, which is in Lebanon, even to the Hyssop which springeth out of the Wall*; we might discern in Things, for themselves incapable of Forecast, one uniform invariable Tendency to their own Preservation, by Methods which loudly proclaim a Forecast employ'd *for* them, tho' plainly at the same Time not inherent *in* them. The same prudential Contrivance is observable in various Parts of the mere *animal* Creation, which yet is not the Result of their own Choice, or Concert, or Counsel, but is plainly the Impression of an overruling Providence proceeding uniformly by the same wise Measures, and giving them

1 Kings iv.  
33.



them a Law which natural Impulse directs them to observe. Human Skill, for Example, could never provide so effectually for the Preservation of Birds or Beasts as they do for themselves respectively; the one where they *make them their Nests*, and the other where they *lay them down in their Dens*. Their Process, when they are not forced out of it, is ever the same, which shews that on *their* Part, there is no *Discretion* in it; and yet so very *discreet* is this Process, so very apt for their Purpose, so exceedingly well fitted to guard against Mischief, and to promote the several Uses which they are to be served by it, that the Art of Man would appear at great Disadvantage, as an errant Bungler, should it pretend to *copy* after, much more should it presume to *improve* upon this *providential Instinct* to correct or amend even the lowest Part of it. But in the Production of *animal* Life, or the meanest Portion of it, the acutest Philosopher is quite at a Loss, and the Generation of the *poorest Insect*, will astonish and confound him. What then shall we

say when we rise in our Enquiries, and come in the Course of them to consider the Make of Man, and the marvellous Union between an *human Soul* and an *human Body*!

If we could fully account for the wondrous Workmanship of the *one*, the harmonious Symmetry of its several Parts, their admirable Subserviency to each other, with the Beauty, Wisdom and Elegance of the whole Composition; if we could trace it from its first *Formation*, to its just *Growth* and *Perfection*, and could fix in our Minds a clear and distinct Idea of the several Steps by which it rises to the full *Measure* of its Stature; yet still the *other* would remain a Mystery; what it can be which should strike a Thought through Matter and Motion howsoever diversified; what it is which enables us to travel thro' the Universe with a few Glances of Meditation; what it is which thro' the Door of our Senses can let in upon us such a beauteous Imagery of the manifold Works of God; what it is which when Sense and Imagination in  
some

some few Examples happen to mislead us, can correct their Errors, and can account for the wrong Appearance; what it is which can carry us beyond all outward and bodily Impressions, and direct us to the Acknowledgment of a Principle far above them, even of superior Intelligences and of God the Father of Spirits.

Again, how the Principle of Thought, whatever it be, should enter into such a strict Alliance with a Substance which seems so little related to it; how it should depend upon the several Changes and Vicissitudes of our Bodies, and exert it self more or less, according to the different Make and Complexion of its Vehicle; how the one should appear to rise and fall, to grow up and to decay with the other, when there is no apparent Band of Connection between them, these are Circumstances, which will add yet more to the Wonders of our Make and Constitution, and would prove even Nature itself all over *Miraculous*, if the *Commonness* of the Case did not render it familiar to us.



But let not *Familiarity* with the Works of God breed in us a *Contempt* of them. As the most *common* Blessings are usually the greatest, and what we could least afford to spare; so the most *common Appearances*, tho' they pass unheeded over the Heads and Hearts of the giddy Multitude, do with a considerate Observer, most loudly proclaim the Wisdom of him who contrived and form'd them in their present Order and Situation. Wherefore,

If the *Heavens declare the Glory of God*, and the *Firmament sheweth his handy Work*, how much more doth *Man*, in whom there is such a marvellous Concurrence of every Thing, which can set forth the Praises of his great Creator?

What seems natural, *i. e.* common and usual, in his Birth and Being, is so far from excluding the Notion of God's Agency, or of his presiding, directing Providence, that the Notion, would we attend to it, is the more fully thence ascertain'd to us; for that it is so *always*, that it is so *uniformly*, that it proceeds by Rule and Method generally invariable,

ble, is an Argument that this *Rule*, this *Method* had a wise and knowing Contriver, who fix'd upon it as the best and fittest, and would not leave an Event of such Consequence to the blind, unguided Incidents of what is call'd *Chance* or *Fortune*. So that the usual and common Process of *second Causes*, is in Strictness of Reasoning more conclusive for a *first*, than any *preternatural Interposals* would be. Since the *latter* happening but rarely, and being limited with Regard to Time and Place and Person, might seem whimsical and freakish in the Relation to those who should only *hear* of it: Whereas the *former* is naked and open to every one's Notice who will vouchsafe a Thought upon it, as implying in it an uniform methodical Scheme of wise Operations and of well-digested Counsels.

In the Formation then of the greater World, and of Man its *Epitome*, and throughout the whole Series and Progress of *secondary Causes*, there is a Rule and Standard appointed by the *first*, according to which all Effects are uniformly

formly produced ; these *Effects* are visible to our Senses, whilst their *Causes* are often hidden from the most enlightned Understandings. Here therefore the pious, humble and grateful Acknowledgment of the holy Psalmist to his all-wise Creator, may well besit, and will indeed best become the Mouth of the acuteest Searcher into the Mysteries of Nature.

Pf. cxxxix.

13, 14, 15, 16.

*I will give Thanks unto thee ; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ; marvellous are thy Works, and that my Soul knoweth right well. My Substance was not hid from thee when I was made in Secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest Parts of the Earth : Thine Eyes did see my Substance, yet being imperfect, and in thy Book were all my Members written ; which Day by Day were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. And again elsewhere, O Lord, how manifold are thy Works ; in Wisdom hast thou made them all, the Earth is full of thy Riches.*

Pfal. civ.

24.

Nor is it only our Birth or our Being which we owe to God as the original Cause of them ; but

II. Se-



II. *Secondly*, It is his Providence which sustains, preserves, and *holds up our Goings in Life*. He not only *took us out of our Mother's Womb*; but *thro' him have we been holden up ever since we were born*.

Independency and Self-Subsistence for a single Moment are no Properties of the Creature; no not of the highest and most exalted. It is indeed a Rule establish'd and confessed in the common Process of secondary Causes, that every Thing would continue in its present State and Situation, were it not removed and disturbed by the Application of somewhat foreign to it, or by the Impulse of some external Agent. Such another Rule there is which supposes a Necessity of Materials for the Foundation of any Workmanship; and so it passes as a Maxim undisputed, that out of nothing, nothing can be produced. That is, human Agents and secondary Causes, can only change the Form of Things; but the Things themselves, the *Substance*, the *Matter* they consist of, they must find made to their Hands, or  
7 their

their Hands will be able to do nothing, But then this affects not the Power or Prerogative of the great divine Artificer, who *spake the Word* (the mighty prolific Word) *and they were made; he commanded, and they were created.*

Pf. cxlviii.  
5.

Just so it is with their *Continuance*. They have not *in*, nor *from* themselves the Principle of Being; though none but he who gave it, can take it from them. By *him*, then, *all Things consist*; he *preserveth and upholdeth them by the same Word of his Power*, which at first commanded them into Existence: So that there was at bottom as much of philosophical Truth, as of Piety and Devotion in that religious Acknowledgment of the holy Apostle, *In him we live, and move, and have our Being*. We could not hold it for a Moment without him. If we could for one Moment, I see not what should hinder us from holding it for *more*, for *many*, and indeed, throughout *all* the Periods of Time and Duration. But neither this nor the other is the Law of our Being; our Tenure is more dependent and precarious. *He holdeth our Souls*

Col. i. 17.

Heb. i. 3.

Acts xvii.  
28.

Psal. xlviii.  
8.

*Souls in Life*, and it is his *Visitation* which Job. x. 12.  
*preserves our Spirits.*

Even if the *Materials* of our Being had, in themselves a Self-subsisting Power, yet the *Form* of them by which we are *Men*, by which we are Creatures of such a Species; this, we know, is liable to various Contingencies, and obnoxious to many fatal Alterations. Wherefore, as we derive our Birth and Being from the Wisdom and Power of our great Creator, so, if we were not nursed up by the Care and Goodness of his paternal Providence, the brittle and tender Threads of Life had probably long since been broken in us, and we had consequently return'd to the Dust from whence we were taken. So that if it were universally true in the strict Sense of Philosophy, that every thing would continue in its present Posture of Being without some external Force to remove and disturb it, yet the present Posture of *our* Life and Being is encountred by so many Casualties, hath so much from *within*, and so much from *without* it to change its *Form* and *Situation*, that we should

2

be



Job. xii.  
10.

be small Gainers by the Maxim, could we ascertain and fix the Truth of it; for still holy *Job's* Conclusion would stand out against us, and remind us of our Dependency, that *in the Hand of the Lord is the Soul of every living Thing, and the Breath of all Mankind.*

But the Process of this Argument, leads us now to our

Mat. vi.  
26.

Mat. x. 29.

III. *Third* Particular, which hints to us a providential Direction and Disposal of such Events as concern us. The Scriptures tell us, that our *heavenly Father feedeth even the Fowls of the Air, and not a Sparrow falleth to the Ground without him.* And an Argument thence is formed by our Saviour for our better Assurance and Security, that *Man*, who is so much more valuable than *they*, hath so much the better Title to the Care of Heaven. This is so plainly supposed throughout the whole Tenor of Divine Revelation, that it is needless to enter into a minute Discussion of it. *Reason* can have nothing to object against it: *Reason* must see that an all-wise, all-knowing Spirit, which  
filleth

filleth all Things; and overspreads each Part of the Universe, with the Immen-  
 sity of his boundless Being, (I say, that such a Spirit) cannot but observe what-  
 ever is transacted throughout his vast Dominions. There is and can be no-  
 thing either too little or too great for his Cognizance and Inspection. *Filling*, Jer. xxiii.  
 as he doth, with his Presence both *Hea-* <sup>24.</sup>  
*ven* and *Earth*, 'tis impossible for any to  
*hide themselves in secret Places*, that he  
 should *not see* them. And seeing them,  
 'tis impossible that he should not regard  
 them; and regarding them, 'tis impossi-  
 ble that he should not observe the Ten-  
 dency of their respective Actions; and ob-  
 serving the Tendency of their respective  
 Actions, 'tis utterly incredible, that he,  
 who is the *Governor among the Nations, the*  
*God who ruleth unto the Ends of the Earth,*  
*the Lord who is their Lawgiver and their*  
*King*, should not interpose, wherever  
 the Case requires it, with some Marks  
 of his favourable Kindness, or with some  
 Tokens of his just Displeasure. And if  
 we would attend to his Dealings with  
 us, every Man, I doubt not, might find his

his own Experience attesting the Truth and Fact of this directing, over-ruling, superintending Providence. And there is farther Room for *supposing* what there cannot always be room for *observing*, viz. Evils unseen by us may be near approaching us, and averted by his gracious Hand, before we are aware of, or can perceive our Danger. The Occasions of Good may be thrown into our Way, and we may pass them unheeded; or they may come before us, so easily, so naturally, so seemingly of their own accord, that we may overlook his invisible Agency, who gave the decisive Turn to them, and who cast them into that Form and Method by which we came up with them.

That all this *may* be so, is very intelligible; that it *actually* is so, both Reason and Revelation concur in representing as highly credible. The Advantage of this to human Life was well understood, and piously acknowledged by that great Philosopher and Emperor *Antoninus* \*; If (saith he) *there be no God, or if he takes no*

\* Εἰ ἔστι Θεός, ἢ ἔ μὲν αὐτῷ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, τί μοι ζῆν ἐν κόσμῳ κίτῳ Θεῷ, ἢ προνοίας κίτῳ;



*Care and Cognizance of our Affairs ; how can it be worth my while, to live any longer in a World not favoured with the Influences of a Divine Power and Providence?*

Under like Views and Apprehensions we read our holy Psalmist breaking out into a noble Rapture: *Thou, Lord, shalt* Ps. xxxvi. *save both Man and Beast: How excellent<sup>7</sup> is thy Mercy, O God! And the Children of Men shall put their trust under the Shadow of thy Wings.*

The Close of my Text hath hinted to us an Inference or two from the foregoing Argument.

*First*, If God be our Creator, Preserver, and Governor, then we can nowhere fix our Dependence so properly, nowhere with such Security and Safety, as upon his infinite Goodness, Wisdom, and Power. This Sense of our Dependence, when well imprinted and kept warm upon our Minds by suitable Acts of religious Homage and Acknowledgment, will easily carry us thro' the whole Class of Duties, which as *Creatures* we owe to our Lord and Maker, or as *accountable* *Creatures* to our Sovereign and Judge.

For do we depend upon a Being, so mighty, so gracious, so knowing, as the Idea of God supposes him? What Tribute can we then refuse him? What Returns can we grudge him? What Measures of reverential Love, and of filial Fear, and of holy Hope, and of humble Trust, and of dutiful Submission, and of grateful Obedience, will not this Confession require and extort from us? And are we not manifestly thus depending? *Is he not*

*Iſa. lxiv. 8. our Father? and are we not all the Work of*  
*Job vii. 20. his Hands?* And is he not also the Pre-  
*Pſ. vii. 10. ſerver of Men?* Is not *our Defence of God?*  
*Pſal. iv. 8. Is it not he who maketh us dwell in Safety?*  
*Pſ. lxi. 8. Is it not he who ruleth by his Power for*  
*1 Tim. vi. ever? The bleſſed and only Patentee; who*  
*15. killeth and maketh alive, who woundeth and*  
*Deut. healeth; who bringeth down to the Grave*  
*xxx. 39. and bringeth up?*  
*1 Sam. ii. 6.*

Whither then ſhould we direct either our Addreſſes of Prayer and Supplication, or our Acknowledgments of Praise and Thankſgiving, or indeed the Tender of all our Services and all our Powers; but to *the Place of his holy Habitation*, who *looketh upon all the Inhabitants*

*Pſ. xxxiii. 14, 15.*

*bitants of the Earth; and fashioneth their Hearts, and considereth all their Works?*

But, *Secondly*, To render this Persuasion of our Dependence on God more practical, we are not only to recognize his Majesty and Power in *Thought* and in *Word*, but in *Deed* and in *Truth*. We are to *acknowledge him in all our Ways*; i. e. in the whole Course of our Lives, and the Tenor of our Actions; we are to do nothing *without* him, and nothing *against* him; nothing without a firm and vigorous Sense of his allwise Providence; nothing in opposition to his holy Will and Commandments. *Vain* is that *help of Man*, which would defeat us of our Title to God's Assistance. Vain are all those Projects and Pursuits of Men, which leave him out of their Scheme, and have no Resort to him for Aid or Counsel. Well may he expostulate, as of old he did by his Prophet, with a People so forgetful of him; *If I be a Father, where is mine Honour? If I be a Master, where is my Fear?* Mal. i. 6.

*Thirdly* and *Lastly*, If we owe our Life and Being to God, as the original Cause



Cause and Donor of them, let his Demands upon us to resign them, find us in the Posture of a ready Obedience. The present Frame of our Being was made for a Dissolution, and the Condition of our *Entrance* into this present Life, was to *depart out* of it, upon the Orders of our Sovereign; whether with *long* Notice or with *short*; whether in *Youth* or in *Age*; whether by the *Pestilence which walketh in Darknes*, or by the *Sickness which destroyeth at the Noon-day*; whether by any sudden Casualty, by the *gradual* Decline of our Health and Strength, or by the *Pároxyfms* of any more *violent* Distemper: These were none of the Terms, whereupon we accepted the Loan of Life, at the Hands of Providence; but we are Tenants at the Will and Discretion of our Lord who hath given us no Reason to guess at the Time he means for our Continuance.

Our Part in this Matter is so to behave upon our present Mansions, that we may wait his Summons to change them, without Anxiety, and receive it without Astonishment or Horror; that

7

when

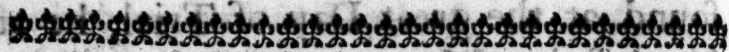
when we resign our Spirits, he may prepare for them a better and more durable Habitation ; and we may find that Power which hath already vouchsafed us one Life, exerting itself again in our Favour, and raising us to another ; even to an *Inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which* 1 Pet. i. 4. *fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for his faithful Servants.*

In which Number that we may all be found at the great Day of Trial, he of his infinite Mercy grant, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord.





## S E R M O N VII.



PROVERBS XV. 3.

*The Eyes of the Lord are in every  
Place, beholding the Evil and  
the Good.*



THE Subject before us is the  
general Inspection, the dif-  
fusive and boundless Pre-  
sence of the divine Spirit  
and Providence; whereby he penetrates,  
pervades, and actuates the whole Mass  
of Beings, is intimately conscious to eve-  
ry Motion and Operation throughout  
the whole Extent of created Nature,  
sees



fees into the darkest Recesses, and distinguishes the minutest Portions of the Universe, *filling all in all*; and beyond all the Boundaries of Things actually existent, tho' these are so immensely wide, so unimaginably various: Tho' there may be Scenes beyond Scenes, and Worlds beyond Worlds, to a Length and Breadth, and Depth and Height astonishing and unmeasurable (yet, I say, beyond the utmost Borders of the present Creation) his mighty Essence spreads itself thro' the vast incomprehensible Void of Infinity, gladding perhaps always with new Productions some Parcel or other in the dark Abyss of empty Space, from the inexhaustible Store-house of his ever-flowing Beneficence.

This magnificent Diffusiveness of his Being throughout and beyond all the Confines of the Universe, our holy Author elsewhere hath celebrated, in a solemn Address of Prayer and Adoration to him: *Behold (saith he) the Heaven* 1 Kings  
*and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain* viii. 27.  
*thee. Fading is the Lustre of those Regions of Light, in Comparison with the*

infinitely *brighter* Splendor of his *Glory*. Too narrow are the Dimensions even of the Court of Heaven, with all its several Outhouses, its *many Mansions*, numerous and various Systems of Being (yet too narrow are these) for the Reception of his infinite Majesty, tho' capacious enough for holding the innumerable Retinue of his Creatures and Dependents.

Pfalm  
cxxxix. 5.

The holy Psalmist hath touch'd this Subject with great Beauty of Thought and Elegance of Expression; although, as he truly intimates, *such Knowledge* was *too wonderful and excellent for him*, so that he could *not attain unto it*. No marvail therefore, if he found *neither Speech nor Language* which could fully reach it. High, however, his Genius soar'd; lofty and pompous is the Description he hath given us in the following Words; the Recital of which cannot,

Pf. cxxxix.  
1 — 12.

I dare say, displease you — O Lord, *thou hast searched me and known me; thou knowest my Down-sitting, and mine Up-rising, thou understandest my Thoughts afar off. Thou compassedst my Path and my Lying-down, and art acquainted with all my Ways.*  
For

*For there is not a Word in my Tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine Hand upon me. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy Presence? If I ascend up into Heaven thou art there; if I make my Bed in Hell thou art there. If I take the Wings of the Morning, and dwell in the uttermost Parts of the Sea; even there shall thy Hand lead me, and thy Right Hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the Darknes shall cover me; even the Night shall be Light about me. Yea, the Darknes hideth not from thee; but the Night shineth as the Day; the Darknes and Light are both alike to thee.*

Here we have God described to us, as intimately present with all the Parts of created Nature, and more especially so with *moral Agents* and with *human Minds*. The Sense and Meaning whereof the great Philosopher, the Author of my Text, in a more compendious and proverbial Way hath thus summ'd up: *The Eyes of the Lord are in every Place, beholding the Evil and the Good.*

Which



Which Words, if you please, we will consider under the two following Views; as they assert

I. The Omnipresence of God's Being, whose *Eyes* (they tell us) *are in every Place.* And

II. In Consequence of the foregoing Article, the Care of his Providence *beholding* and distinguishing between the *Evil and the Good.*

I. Upon the former of these Views, it shall be my Endeavour to place it in such Points of Light as may assist, in some Measure, your Conceptions of it; although I pretend not to give you (what I have not my self) any adequate Knowledge or Idea of it.

1. *First* then by Way of *Similitude*, tho' by no Means of *exact Parallel*, be pleased to consider with me the Operations of an *human Soul* in and upon an *human Body*, and try whether we can thence derive any Light upon the Argument here before us. How our Spirits actuate our Bodies, or command them  
into

into those various Motions, Postures, and Actions, which they are fitted severally to receive, or to exert, is one of those Mysteries which we cannot penetrate. But we feel and are conscious of the Power, tho' we know not how we came by it; and therefore the Fact is undisputed, that the Mind is present at once to each and every Part of our little World, animates with its constant uninterrupted Influences every Particle of our vital Clay, keeps watchful Guard upon all the Avenues and Portals of our Senses, at the same Time presiding in the more secret Chambers and Retirements of sublimer Thought and of finer Speculation; *all, as the Schools speak, in all, and all in each Part at once\**; as being incapable of Division or Diminution, of Composition or Separation, or of any Thing inconsistent with the *Simplicity* of its Nature.

Imagine the Spirit of God thus acting thro' every Part and Portion of the Universe, yet with a Fulness of Power and Perfection, neither limited by it, nor passive in any Degree or Manner *from it*.

\* Totum in toto, & totum in qualibet parte.

Imagine

Imagine him diffusing in various Measures, thro' different Orders and Ranks of Being, the Rays of his boundless Spirit, present with the minute Particle of his Creation, as well as with the highest and most exalted Cherubim, *dividing to all severally as he willeth*, and superintending the whole with the united Efficacy of his Wisdom, Goodness, and Power: You will then have as clear a Notion of his Presence with the whole System of created Nature, as you have of that Intercourse which your own Souls maintain with your Bodies; you know not *how* indeed, but yet are sure upon inward Feeling and Consciousness, that such Intercourse between them is in Fact maintained and supported. Only, as I have hinted in this *Comparison*, you must be ever careful to exclude from it whatever shall imply any *Passiveness* in God, or any *Limitation* of his infinite Mind. For the *Soul of Man* can exert no immediate Act, beyond the little Sphere and narrow Dimensions of its proper *Body*; and is obnoxious besides to manifold Impressions from it: Whereas the



the Spirit of God is *impassible*, and can *suffer* nothing from any Collision of the Elements, or from any external Accidents which may affect in Whole, or in Part, the great Machinery of the Universe. He sees indeed, and observes it with the Eye of an indulgent Creator, and an holy Governor; but can *no other Ways* be affected with any Thing, which either natural or moral Agents may *do*, or *suffer* in it. Nor is the Sphere of his Activity, or the Compass of his Power restrain'd in any Manner to it. He can act *out* of it as well as *in* it; he may be forming, as I have hinted, new Worlds in the vast *Void of Space*, as well and easily as he hath form'd any System or Systems, which we now behold, or can imagine, in any Part of it. Such is the Privilege, such the Prerogative of an infinite Spirit, present to all Things *actual*, present to all Things *possible*. But

2. The Scriptures, it may be said, have represented God, as present in some Places more, or rather, than in others; and most eminently above all, in the peculiar *Habitation of his Holiness and Glory*,

*Glory*, which, it hath been the general Sense of Mankind, is literally and truly a *local Distinction*, where he is pleased to display far greater and higher Degrees of his Majesty, than in any other Part of his ample Dominions; and to enliven that illustrious Scene with all the Beauties and Embellishments of his divine imperial Glory.

Let us therefore see whether the aforementioned *Comparison*, carried a little farther, will not administer some Help to us in this Difficulty, and illustrate also this Part of our Question.

It hath been observed, that the *human Soul* actuates each Part and Particle of an *human Body*, is *present* at once to every one of them, feels, and sees, and thinks, admits Ideas and Sensations of various Sorts, thro' different Canals and Organs at one and the same Instant; whilst yet the *Head* is the manifest Laboratory of its noblest and finest Operations, where it exerts the purest, and brightest, and strongest Acts of Contrivance and Invention, of Thought and Understanding. Now what the  
Soul

Soul of Man is form'd to do by the Skill and Wisdom of its heavenly Architect, he may chuse for himself to do, upon the Reasons of State and Providence, which he hath partly revealed to us, and may have partly concealed within the Veil of his hidden Counsels; for Example, he may display to *different Orders*, or to *different Proficients* in the *same Rank* of Being, various Communications of his Glory, and may open, thro' different Appartments, nearer or more distant Approaches, to the all-chearing *Light of his Countenance*. Those who are the most immediate Ministers of his Will, and the nearest in Attendance upon his *Majestic Presence*, may well be supposed of the first Class in the Creation; there may be Throne above Throne, Light above Light, and Glory above Glory, in Openings and Ascents innumerable, each fitted to the respective Attainments and Capacities of those who shall severally be admitted to them; and the *highest Heaven*, allowing it to enclose within its inconceivable and mighty Compass, the whole created System, may yet have Mansions  
enough



enough in it to receive and entertain even the greatest Assembly of Beings, which ever acted a rational Part in any of its lower Orbs. *There*, I say, the great Creator may exhibit what different Degrees he pleases of Illumination and Joy, to the several Inhabitants of that lovely Region, who yet, like the People of this lower World, may be planted upon a vast, indefinite Variety of Situations of more or less Beauty, with Prospects brighter or more shaded, as to the OEconomy of his holy Providence shall seem most proper for each and all of them.

But no Reason can, I'm sure, be given, why the same uniform, simple, undivided Essence must equally every where exert itself, or why it may not manifest its Acts and Operations more and rather in one Place than another.

The *human Soul*, tho' absent from *none*, yet exerts apparently its most elevated and exalted Acts of Thought in *one especial Part of the human Body*.

The Thoughts of *God*, tho' not like *Man's*, progressive and limited, may yet be communicated *to Man* by limited and progressive

progressive Measures; and thus, by nearer and nearer Approaches to our Maker's *Presence*, the *Fullness of our Joy* may be compleated, and by a gradual Enlargement of our Faculties and Powers, he may advance at length to the *right Hand* of his Majesty, where *there are Pleasures for evermore*. But,

3. As *Place* hath in Strictness a near Relation to Bodies, and to the Order of their several Positions and Situations, the Idea of *local Presence* is apt to mix itself with that Relation, when we apply it to Spirits; and so becomes confused and figurative, rather than clear or proper. Wherefore, when we speak or think of the *Divine Presence*, we should endeavour to represent and to consider it, rather under the View of a *vital Energy*, a *knowing Influence*, a *powerful Activity*, from which no Place, no Creature, no Body, no Spirit, not even the great Gulph of mere Space, is in any Manner exempted. He can call forth into Being what now hath none; and shrivel up the whole Mass of created Nature into its primitive Chaos, or its original Nothing.

*As a Vesture he can fold up its several Parts, and unfold them again with quite new Appearances. They are all of them naked and open to his Sight, as well in the Miniature of their smallest Compositions, as in the fuller Stretch of their biggest Dimensions; as well in the first small Speck of Entity, as in the larger Proportions of full-grown Life. And they are all, from the least Grain of the Creation to the most exalted Spirit, as subject to his Power, as they are open to his Inspection. Fire and Hail, Snow and Vapour Wind and Storm, fulfil his Word, as uniformly, as punctually, as constantly as the Angels, which excel in Strength, fulfil his Commandment, and hearken unto the Voice of his Word. So that there is no Part of the Universe free from the Control of his Almighty Power. He doth according to his Will in the Army of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, and none can stay his Hand, or say unto him, What dost thou? His Presence with all Things acquaints him with all Things, and makes all Things easy to him.*

Dan. iv.  
35.



Hitherto we have considered the Creator of the World as intimately *present* with each and every Part of it.

Proceed we now,

II. *Secondly*, To consider him as *more especially present* with *moral Agents*, and with *human Minds*. For, as the Text hath in general observed to us, that his *Eyes are in every Place*; so it hath more particularly remark'd upon the Care of his Providence, as *beholding* and distinguishing between *the Evil and the Good*. Here it is my Design,

1. To enter upon a Disquisition of the Fact, to shew that it is, and must needs be so, and cannot with any good Sense be conceiv'd to stand otherwise.

2. To consider the Uses we should make of it.

1. As to the Fact, there will be little Question, if the Premises are agreed to. It was an unphilosophical and narrow Notion of the *Epicurean* \* School, that God stood aloof and far remote from the

\* ——— Divum natura necesse est  
Semota a rebus nostris sejunctaque longè.

Lucret.

Care and Cognizance of human Affairs, because, forsooth, they would create him Trouble and Discomposure.

Jer. xxiii.  
23, 24.

Whereas the God *who filleth Heaven and Earth, is alike a God at hand and afar off*; and his *Eyes*, being in *every Place*, cannot but let in upon his divine Understanding the Light of all things which any where are knowable, with the same Ease and Expedition, as the Light of the Sun conveys to an Eye which is found and open, the Ideas of Things which are visible and *present* to it.

Surely then *moral* Truths, and the eternal Differences between Good and Evil, with the Congruity of Things which are just and right to the original Standard of all Perfection, will plead as strongly for a close Regard to them, as any Degrees of Symmetry or Beauty, of Harmony or Proportion in the natural World, shall engage the Attention of a curious Observer. If upon seeing and pronouncing that all was *good*, all was uniform in the material World, as it came out of its Creator's Hands, he seem'd to acquiesce in a pleasing Retro-  
spect

spect upon his own Works; if, when the *Foundations thereof were fastened, and the Corner Stone thereof was laid, the Morning Stars* are represented as *singing together, and all the Sons of God as shouting for Joy*; what Degrees of serene Complacency must it excite in the one, and of more rapturous Transports in the other, to see his *Will* perform'd upon *Earth* as it is in *Heaven*? How much more amiable and entertaining is the Spectacle of *moral*, than of any *natural* Beauty? How much more valuable the Obedience of a rational Creature, than of any thing which *acts*, or rather, which *is acted*, by Instinct and Constraint? It is a Contradiction to our Ideas of God as a wise and holy Being, to suppose him seeing and observing the *one*, without *beholding* and regarding the *other*: He can, indeed, be negligent of *neither*, when he is essentially present to *both*, and *both* unavoidably stand full in his Sight. For in him all *live, and move, and have their Being*.

I shall say no more to the *Fact*, which is so highly credible, that I will not suppose it can be doubted, after a very small



Degree of Attention to the Sum of the many Reasons which conclude for it; but shall proceed, as I propounded,

2. To the Uses we should make of it. And,

*First*, From this intimate and immediate Presence of God to his whole Creation, and more especially to moral Agents, the Sinner may reasonably stand aghast with Terror and Confusion at the Deformity of his own Actions. He is breaking in upon the Counsels of Eternity, and thwarting the Purposes of Divine Wisdom and Holiness in the Sight of his awful Governor, under the Inspection and Observation of his all-seeing Judge. And yet he vainly whispers to his own Heart, that *the Lord will not see, neither will his God regard it*. Both which are impossible Supposals, big with Absurdity and Contradiction. His safer, as well as more reasonable View, would be to consider, how easily a Being always present to his Mind, could let in upon it unutterable Horrors, Agonies, and Torments of an unknown, inconceivable Nature, lash and tear it with Scorpions  
of

of the sharpest String, and overspread it with *Blackness of Darkness for ever*; that Hell itself would be less than it is a Place of Torments, if the confounding *Presence* of incensed Omnipotence did not add to the Shame and Pain of its Punishments, and furnish its wretched Inhabitants with never-ceasing Occasions of Anguish, Remorse, and bitter, tho' fruitless then and vain, Self-compunction. This surely might be improved into an Antidote against the highest Offers of Sin, and the best-pointed Temptations to Disobedience.

*Secondly*, Let the good Man consider on the other Hand, the Comforts he may derive from a Sense of God's *constant Presence* with him. His Maker sees and observes him in all his Pressures, in all the Difficulties and Conflicts of Virtue; and with one chearing Beam from the *Light of his Countenance*, can easily smoothe to him the roughest Passages, and carry him with Ease thro' the greatest Hardships. So that with the Gust and Experience of the holy Psalmist, he may address himself to the Au-

Pfal. xciv.  
19.

thor, and, if I may so be allowed to speak, the inseparable *Companion* of his Being; *In the Multitude of the Sorrows which I had in my Heart, thy Comforts have refreshed my Soul.* In the gayer Seasons of Prosperity, he hath the Restraints and Aids of Divine Grace and Providence, to secure him from undue Excursions, and to improve for him the Relish of each happy Incident. The Presence of God is at once the Protection and the Joy of Innocence. This World without it would not be worth the Trouble of a good Man's \* Abode in it; and the next would then be quite out of View and Prospect. What a forlorn Creature would he be, *walking in a vain Shadow*, with so little Foresight of his own to direct him, and with no Hope of Help from any superior Wisdom? But how much more forlorn, in the Loss of that all-cheering Prospect, that he shall one Day so be present with his God and Guide, as to see him in the glorious Lustre of his unveiled Perfections, without any

\* Τί μοι ζῆν ἐν κόσμῳ ὅτε κενῶ, ἢ Προγίαις κενῶ;  
Antonin.

Fear



Fear of Separation, or Danger of Removal; and with a full Assurance of perpetual Advances from Truth to Truth, from Glory to Glory, and from one Discovery to another, beyond all the Arithmetick of Time, for ever and ever?

*Thirdly* and Lastly, To avoid the Terrors which the Consideration of God's Omnipresence must imprint upon the Sinner, and to enter us upon the Comforts which the good Man may well expect from it; let us be all persuaded to live and to behave in every Circumstance of Life, like a People sensible who is the Spectator, and who is to be the Judge of all their Actions. It was, I think, the Advice of *Cicero*, that we should habituate our Imaginations to the View of some Person eminent for the Gravity and Sanctity of his Manners, should suppose ourselves in his Presence, and carry ourselves in all Points as we would do before him. Whilst any Remains of Modesty were left with us, this, he thought, might be a Check upon our Conduct, and some Fence to Virtue. But the Motive may derive

*Sene can  
Lucilius*

derive a great Deal of Improvement from the Subject of my Text. For if a Man like ourselves, a little, perhaps, superior to us, in the Distinctions of outward Life and Character would restrain us from transgressing the Rules of Decency, how much more should a Sense of his all-seeing Eye control us, who *weigheth all our Actions, and knoweth all our Hearts, and understandeth all the Imaginations of our Thoughts*; who himself is holy and pure, just and righteous, a Lover of Righteousness in others, and a sure Avenger of all Ungodliness and Wrong?

In vain do we labour Appearances, and to live in Form, except we could impose upon the great Searcher of Hearts, who *seeth not as Man seeth*, but discerns them as they are in their *original Machinations*, and in their *After-motions*, stripp'd of Disguises and borrow'd Pretensions, in their true Position and in their proper Light. So that no Sort or Degree of Wickedness can *escape* him; for our *God in his Displeasure will search it out*; Yes! he hath searched it out,

out, and knoweth it; and it stands *noted in the Book of his Remembrance*, till the great Day of Accounts shall overtake us, when he will *bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

May his favourable Presence be now and ever with us; here in the *Comforts of his gracious Help*, and hereafter in the *Participations of his glorious Kingdom.*

Which he of his infinite Mercy vouchsafe to us all, thro' *Jesus Christ* our only Mediator and Advocate.

*To whom be ascribed all Might, Majesty and Dominion now and for ever.*

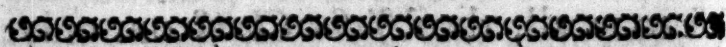


S E R M O N





## S E R M O N VIII.



P S A L M CXIX. 96.

*I have seen an End of all Perfection; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*



**A**S the whole Psalm is a Panegyrick upon the Law of God, and was intended to display the Usefulness, the Necessity, the Extent and Compass of Religion: So the Text hath particularly insisted upon its *comparative* Excellence; that whereas all other Things in Life, how  
 2 good

good soever or otherwise esteemable, had a Boundary and Limitation set to them, such as every Region or Country had; yet the Law of God had an Extent and Compass, which took in all Times, all Persons, all Circumstances, all Occasions and Conjunctures of this Life; and even beyond this Life, beyond this contracted and narrow Sphere, carried its Weight and Use with it into another; and as it had been, like the Word and Wisdom of the Father, from Everlasting, so it would continue to Everlasting, and be as much without *End* as it had been without *Beginning*. This in other Words, is the Purport of the Psalmist's Encomium upon Religion; as we understand by Religion, a Sense of our Obligation to the Will of God, howsoever notified or convey'd to us. Or thus: " Tho' the best Attainments  
" or Enjoyments of this World, with  
" whatsoever can be call'd or esteem'd  
" most perfect in it, have a Period, a  
" Boundary, a determinate Measure and  
" Conclusion appointed for them; yet  
" the Law of God hath no such Defects  
" in

“ in it; but it is exceedingly and infinitely Comprehensive: The Heart of Man can no more reach its *Compass*, than his Will can be wrought up to the Perfection of its *Practice*. It hath in it self no Blemishes nor Failures, but what it contracts from our lame and partial Observance of it.”

Upon this View and Explication of my Text you will easily observe, that it consists of two principal Branches.

I. The Character of the Thing to which the Law of God is compared; which is the Scantiness of all sublunary Perfection.

II. The Subject of the Comparison, with its proper Encomium; which is the Extent and Compass of Religion, or the Commandment of God.

I. I begin with the Character of the Thing to which the Law of God is compared; *viz.* The Scantiness of all sublunary Perfection.

Now whether we consider this in gross and in general; or descend to the particular



cular Instances of what is most esteem'd and courted in human Life, we shall find the Psalmist's Complaint hath too much in it of Truth and Justice to be denied or disputed.

I. In general, we find that every Thing here hath its proper Beginning, Progress and Period, thro' each of which Stages it is moreover attended with its peculiar Defects; the Works of Art and of Nature, do all bear Testimony to the Truth of this Observation. And tho' *Nature*, as guided by a superior Wisdom, is ever more perfect in her Works than *Art*, yet even the Productions of *Nature* have their known Periods; the vegetable, the Animal, and the rational Life, have their imperfect Beginnings, their uncertain Progresses, and their *sure* Conclusions; which indeed is the only *Certainty* belonging to them. How little and contemptible is every Thing in its first Formation; be its Figure never so great and so considerable in its after Improvements! In its Advances towards these Improvements, to what Accidents is it liable, and how many are the Contingencies

tingencies which may and do often defeat it in each of its Essays towards its designed Perfection! And then how soon doth *Rottenness* follow upon *Ripeness*, and *Declension* begin, when *Perfection* hath attain'd its End! Even this *Perfection* it self, how little doth it deserve its Name! A Bloom of Beauty which detains for a few Moments the Spectator's Eye, then withers away even sooner than the Eye which beholds it! A blazing Appearance, whirling by us as swift as the Motions of Time which carry it; whose Aspect, tho' fair and *flourishing like that of a green Bay-Tree*, yet we may presently look at, and *lo! it is gone*; we may seek it, but *its Place can no where be found*! Or perhaps a Flash of delusive Satisfaction, which amuses for a while, then *vanishes like Smoke, or as a Dream when one awaketh*! These are the Perfections of our present State, and this is the full Extent and Compass of what is most esteem'd in it; to begin with Contempt, to proceed amidst various Contingencies, and as soon as the *Top of the Hill*

Hill is gain'd, to rowl down again to the Bottom of it.

But to take our Leave of *Generals*, and to go into *Particulars*, let us consider human Life (which we are most concern'd in) both in the main Stages of it, and in its most usual Pursuits or Attainments; and upon this Survey we shall find, that in each of them the Psalmist's Assertion is just and well supported; each having assign'd to it its proper Boundary, and each being attended with its peculiar Failures.

I. Let us consider human Life in the main Stages of it; and from thence observe how soon we are likely to come at an End of its Perfections.

Its Infancy, we may observe, is a mere animal State, only far more helpless than that of other Animals. So that the only Perfection of that Stage in Life, is to get out of it as fast as may be; and to stretch into another but little better. We look back with Contempt and Scorn upon our childish Follies; are free to acknowledge those Defects in our Reason which made us speak, and think, and



as Children ; and at Years of Discretion, the few who ever see them, will readily enough give up the Conduct of their Youth, and confess its manifold Imperfections. Hitherto then the Advance is only making towards Perfection ; which is so far from being ended, that it is not yet begun. We are to look for it therefore in the just Maturity and Settlement of Manhood. Now of about sixty or seventy Years in Life (which yet prove not the Lot of one in sixty or seventy) we may allow about thirty, to the Chance of finding it. I say the *Chance* of finding it ; for very many within this Period live as if they never sought for it ; never once consider'd what Wisdom or Virtue meant ; which yet are essential Ingredients into the *Perfection* of human Life, if ever it shall come near the Character. But we are to take our Estimate from the best, and therefore to form it upon the Case of those, who have most labour'd to attain what is most truly valuable. And yet if even these Men survive this Period, they will

will look back upon it with quite other Views, than those whereupon they acted in the *midst* of it; they will observe many Things to correct, many to be asham'd of, many favourable Occasions slipt or perverted; and will reflect upon the Whole, that *Perfection* is a Word which is much too big even for their highest and best Advances. For indeed Life is like a Picture, which is seen at most Advantage from a distant Prospect; the nearer you come up to the several Parts of it, the more you discern the Coarseness of the Dawb, and the various Blemishes in the whole Performance. And when you are going off from it, the Impression of its several Beauties grows fainter and more languid, till you quite lose Sight of it, and from Fiction and Shadow enter upon real Life. Here we go on pleasing our selves with Trifles, from the Rattles of our Childhood to the little less impertinent Amusements of our Manhood. As we rise higher, we discern in each Step of our several Improvements, the

N 2 Empti-

Emptiness and Vanity of our preceding Entertainments. And 'tis likely the Time may come, when even our present Views shall appear to us as vain and trivial upon a serious Reflection, as the Employments of our Youth or Childhood do now appear to us. 'Tis true, we now *have put away childish Things*; and have upon our Hands more weighty Business, and our Heads are fill'd with Designs of much greater Consequence: But may not this Business and these Designs appear to us in the Close of Life as mean and contemptible, as the Follies and Levities of its preceding Stages do at present *shew* to us? When the Scene is just opening, which will present us with a far nobler View of Things, and more exceeding any present Prospect, than any present Prospect can exceed a past one; our Apprehension and Sense of them will rise, we trust, in some due Proportion to them; and then our Retrospect upon what is past may represent it, I say, as little and as childish to us, as our present Retrospect can represent any Passages in our preceding Life.

For



For indeed all the Things of this World look best (as I have observ'd) upon a distant Prospect: When you come up with them, they usually deceive you; and whilst Men are labouring to come up with them, the most are tired or worn out with the Fatigue of it, and tho' they keep in *Sight*, yet they have little *Hope*. But Experience proves them all to be very Vanity, and no wise Man would accept the Privilege, if offer'd him, of going over his Ground again, or of travelling thro' so many dirty Stages for the small Proportion he hath found in them of fair Road, good Company, or agreeable Entertainment. No Man in the Vigour of his Age would willingly be a *Child* again; nor would any Man who is going to be an *Angel*, willingly be a *Man* again. When he hath only the Pangs of *one* new Birth to go thro', he would not, if he is wise, be forced upon more, would not chuse to be reduced to a mere *animal* State, thence to learn with Difficulty the Attainments of a *rational*; to commit in each Step of them a thousand Errors,

and thro' these several Degrees of Discipline to fit himself for *being* what *now* he *is*. A wise Man, I say, would be rather glad that so much of his Work was over, that he had made so many Advances towards the just Perfection of his Being; but when he is so near his Freedom, he would not certainly re-enter upon his former Servitude, to be so much farther from it; would not unlearn what he hath learnt of his proper Calling, for the unnatural Pleasure of learning it over again. I call it an unnatural Pleasure, because in other Cases, it is accounted Drudgery. For, as Christians, we are told, we have a proper Vocation, and the Church of *Christ* is the School wherein we learn it. There we are train'd up to the Exercise of various Virtues; these in our first Essays towards them have their Difficulties, which are so far from being denied, that they are objected and complain'd of. Yet they are necessary to carry us thro' our Nonage and Minority, to the Perfection of our Manhood, to the *Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ*. Now, I say,

say, no Man in his Senses who hath been for any Time a Learner, and made any Progress here, would be content with being put backwards, or forced to learn over again those Tasks and Lessons which have cost him already such Pains and Trouble. He would rather surely press forwards to the Mark of the Prize, and rejoice when he comes within a near Prospect of it. Whatsoever may appear to the Men of the World figurative and borrow'd in this Representation, to the Men of Religion will have another Face with it, and be consider'd as a literal and proper Truth. For this World is really and strictly a School of Discipline for another; we have our Tasks and our Lessons in it, which, as we severally perform them, will either advance or degrade us; they are all of them design'd for a proper Use; and according to the Measure of our present Proficiency, such will be the Proportion of our future Exaltation or Abasement. Now then, in such a State as this, should not every Thing be measur'd by its Subserviency to the great Design of it? Should



not all the intervening Recreations and Advantages which may be permitted to us whilst we continue under it, be more or less esteem'd of as they have a Tendency to promote or hinder our respective Improvements in it? Even where these Recreations and Advantages are dispensed in the fullest Measure, would it be judging Right to neglect our main Business for them, or to be desirous of continuing always in a State of Learners, for the Sake of these Toys and Play-Things which amuse us in it? In the Figure and the Theory, we should all of us certainly be ready to say, No, far be it from us to judge so weakly! Yet in real Life and Practice, how few of us judge otherwise! How few of us are able to disengage from the Interludes of our proper Business, or even to accept the finishing Stroke in it with any Thing like Contentment! Tho' we are sure there is nothing like *Perfection here*, and are convinced that *hereafter* we may attain it, and must lay the Foundation of it in our present Management; yet how rarely can the Man be found, who acts  
not

not *here* as if he had *elsewhere* no Interest depending? With the most absolute and entire Attachment to worldly Cares, and to present Pursuits; as if he could prove to Demonstration that there is nothing beyond them! This is the most usual and ordinary Process of human Life: Each Stage in it is intent upon its own proper Amusements; is condemn'd for being so by the next succeeding it; till the last condemns all the rest, and meets it self with the very same Censure from each superior Spirit who observes it.

Such *Boundaries* and *Limitations* hath all Perfection in our present State; or (as I would rather say) such and so manifold are its Blemishes and Imperfections. Which will appear yet farther in the

2. *Second Place*, if you will proceed with me to the Consideration of human *Pursuits* and *Attainments*.

*First*, As to human Pursuits, let it be observ'd of all of them, that they are very laborious, and at last their Success is very uncertain; which is *surely* enough to

to keep the Character of any Thing relating to them at a due Distance from *Perfection*, or from any Pretence to it.

It was a notable Expression of the Prophet and just Representation of human Life and Conduct, that the *Peo-*  
 Hab. ii. 13. *ple should weary themselves for very Vanity.* He observes, indeed, with great Truth and Propriety, that it was *not of the Lord*, that the People should do so, or should *labour*, as it seems they did, *in the very Fire*; but it was the Matter of common Observation, that they did so; and therefore a natural and easy Inference, that they would *go on* to do so. For, indeed, the Life of most Men is, and hath always been a perpetual Struggle; and tho' by a very early Appointment and Sentence of God, we were destin'd to Labour, yet not to *labour* (as the Prophet hath expressed it) *in the very Fire*; not with that excessive Difficulty, that infinite Application, that wasting Care, that consuming Fervor of Spirit which so usually push on the common Endeavour and Business of human Life. These are the Excesses of a Passion, which in its Rise  
 and



and Principle, and within proper Restraints, is fit and laudable. Nor is any Man exempt from some Share of this Burden, who doth not owe the Privilege of his Exemption from it to a faulty Indolence, which inclines him to sit down in Sloth and Laziness, because he finds himself at Ease in his Possessions, and is not therefore obliged to make one in the common Scramble. And if the Goods of Fortune were all which it were fit to aim at, he might, who had enough of them, sit down contented and commended, without engaging in the Scuffle for them. But every Man hath some Wants or other which he should labour to supply; and if all were full and abounding with him, he would be thence obliged to form *some* Design, to enter upon *some* Measures, for the Good of others. But this in reality is no Man's Case; no Man, I would say, is so full, or so abounding as not to have Wants, which call for a Supply. For if *Fortune* hath prov'd kind to him; *Nature* perhaps hath been less indulgent, and given him a Mind or Body which stands in great  
Need

Need of Assistances and Supports. His Mind, he may assure himself, will never be over-stock'd by the largest Measures which can be infused into it, of Wisdom and Virtue. Nor will it be easy for him to obtain a due Portion of either. If indeed he will view himself in the Light of a false Comparison, and thence observe that others are *less* furnished, he will easily think he hath enough of *both*, and so will soon lose what he really hath of *either*. This is the most favourable and advantageous Posture of human Life, which yet is seen even here condemn'd to the Drudgery of perpetual Labour, or to the contemptible inglorious Ease of Ignorance and Sloth. But in the ordinary Course and Process of Life, its Pursuits are *more* necessary, *more* laborious, and yet the Success is much *less* certain; its Comforts and Pleasures are seldom to be had without Pains and Troubles, which pay too dear for them; and yet, it may be, the Bargain at last is not made good to the deluded Purchaser; but after he hath sent out his Hopes and Fears a good way in Quest  
7 of

of it, they return to him in the Result, disappointed and empty; and tho' he hath paid a round Price beforehand in personal Labour, great Application, tormenting Anxiety, and all the Agonies of Suspense and Dependence, he finds himself in the Conclusion where he was at setting out; only Time all along hath been wearing away from him, and hath much contracted his remaining Prospect. Perhaps in the midst of his Bustle, in the Bloom of his Hopes, when he is in *Sight*, and only not in *Reach*, of the Fruits of all his Labour, he is arrested by the Hand of Providence; thus all his Schemes are at once disconcerted and all his Measures broken by the surprising Summons. These are no unusual, they are indeed the most familiar and ordinary Incidents of Life; what we daily observe, and which by being so common seem to have lost the Power of affecting us with a proper Concern or with becoming Sentiments. Our nearest Relatives, our Bosom Companions, our most intimate Friends fall off from us, and yet we consider not whither  
they



they are gone, nor when, nor how it may be our Lot to follow them: This is our Foolishness; Posterity will take the Example from us, and will *praise the Saying*, and the Doing so. The Success or Failure of one and another Pursuit, is still attended with a fresh Experiment; so that the Labour of Life is upon the Matter very little lessened, whether *Attainment* or *Disappointment* be the Result and Fruit of it. Let us then proceed,

*Secondly*, In the next Place, to the Consideration of *human Attainments*; and see what *Perfection* we are likely to find in them, since there is so little Probability of meeting with it in *human Pursuits*.

*Who* or *what* will shew us any Good? is the grand Question in Life, and the Aim of all its Pursuits; and when these have succeeded, the Good which is gained by them must be either *sensual, intellectual*, or merely *imaginary*. Wherefore, if none of these can pretend to the Character of *Perfection*, there remains no other which hath the least Appearance of a Claim to it. Now,

1. If sensual Good could with any Decency

cency put in for the noble Character of *Perfection* in them, Mankind must veil to a lower Species and give up its Precedency to the *Beasts which perish*. They, 'tis certain, are better qualified for the Enjoyment of it, with fewer Draw-backs and Allays, than Beings, who can forecast and reflect, as well as think only for the present Moment: For in the *Reflection* and *Forecast* sensual Good hath no manner of Interest. The *Prospect* too much anticipates, as a *Retrospect* imbitters it. By dwelling a great deal upon it beforehand, a Man finds the less from it when he comes to taste it; and the more he tastes of it when he hath it, the less will its Remembrance please him. So that it is plainly calculated for nothing more nor farther than the very Instant of enjoying it; and let its *Perfection* be what it will, for so minute a Continuance, the *End* is so near its *Beginning*, that it must thence approve itself little worth. Its Foundation, besides, is laid in a Disposition of Things very nice and curious, whose Order, when once disconcerted, utterly mortifies the Sense, or else turns  
the

the expected Pleasure into real Torment. The Idea of *Perfection* will never therefore tally with so mismatched a Subject. Whatsoever Good there is in it, must be confessed exceedingly imperfect; its Bounds are so narrow, that they extend not beyond the present Moment, and even the Satisfaction of *that* is to a great Degree anticipated by a disproportionate Expectation, and afterwards paid for far above its intrinsic Value, by a Leanness of Soul and a Vexation of Spirit. We may farther and truly add, by way of Abatement to it, that whensoever indulged beyond the Rules of Reason and Mediocrity, it enervates the Vigour of the Mind, weakens the same Powers of Wisdom and Virtue, sets a Man beneath the proper Rank and Dignity of his Being, and hinders those Improvements, which alone can fit him for a divine and spiritual Life. In the Stops and Checks which Reason would give to these irregular Indulgences, there is Trouble enough to be found for the Conviction of any considerate Observer, that this can never be the Seat of his proper



per Happiness, and that the Road to it does not lie in so foul a Tract. There is so little in the most and best of it; there are so many Abatements to be made upon a just Calculation; such Dependence it hath upon Things and Circumstances, which we can no more govern than we can new-make ourselves; so much Mischief attends it in all Excesses, and so much Labour and Struggle must go to prevent them; that a wise Man would look any where for *Perfection*, rather than in such a filthy Common Shore of all Corruption.

But now tho' sensual Good is really the last of those which can pretend to the Character; yet, perhaps,

2. Intellectual Good may have a better Claim to it; for Wisdom and Knowledge seem the proper Characteristics of reasonable Creatures: Here, if any where, they demand the Privilege of Distinction from Beings of a lower Order; here they shine in their brightest and most advantageous Lustre; and some Allowances are certainly due to their several Improvements in Talents

of such a beautiful Figure, and such mighty Consequence. All this is true, and yet Perfection in them is by no Means here attainable; their Perfection, like that of the rest, hath its Bounds and Limits, and as the Things which are knowable are infinite, whilst the Capacity which should comprehend them is finite and contracted, there must be a mighty Gap and Disproportion between the Faculty and the Object. In speculative Knowledge, even when employ'd upon commensurate and finite Objects, how lamely doth the Faculty proceed! How doth it skim over the Surface of Things, and content itself with that unaccurate superficial Knowledge, which it can pick up in such a hasty Passage! The *Nature* of them is a Word which we have found out to cover our Ignorance, and to express an inexplicable and hidden Meaning: Even the Things which we are most familiar with, which we converse with daily, and with which all our Senses are most intimately acquainted, enter but little farther into our Reason, than our Senses necessarily carry them;

them; we aim now and then at some Refinements upon them, but the feeble Essay betrays our want of Power and of Skill to search beyond our Sight, or to find out the minutest Object to Perfection. *Practical* Knowledge may be allowed to proceed a little farther, because it hath the Assistances of Sense to back it. But yet how manifold are the Blunders of the wisest and most experienced Actors in human Life! How little is there really owing to their proper Management and Dexterity even in their most successful, most applauded Atchievements! How often doth it happen, that whilst the Wisdom of the Wise is defeated, and the Cunning are taken in their own Craftiness; a Man of a low and creeping Genius, who hath no comprehensive Views, nor is able to see beyond the Consequence which lies next him, shall rise upon the Bottom of mere fortunate Occasions, which none but a Natural could miss of improving! This single Consideration, methinks, should mortify the Pride of human Understanding, which, when brought to the Test,



is found of so little Use; when so much may be done with so small a Share of it; and so little can be performed by the Strength of it, when lucky Contingencies do not lend it Help. Surely Knowledge must be at a very low Ebb with us, when in Matters of *Speculation*, we can attain no perfect Knowledge of ourselves, or of the meanest Thing about us; and when in Matters of *Practice* there is so little Difference between the Wise and Foolish, that the one as often succeeds in his Management of them as the other. It is easy, certainly, to see an *End* of all such scanty *Perfection*, as concludes in a Manner, where it began, and advances so little beyond its first setting out.

Now, if neither *Sensual* nor *Intellectual* Good, which have each of them some Foundation in the Nature of Men and Things; I say, if neither of these be able to support the Character of Perfection, what (in the last Place) must we think of a mere imaginary Good, which is only indeed the Shadow of it, and hath no where a real Subsistence, but in  
Humour

Humour and Fancy? The Pride, I mean, and the Port of Life, which are calculated only for amusing a thoughtless Multitude, or the Man as thoughtless as they; who struts in borrowed Feathers, and is inclin'd now and then to think himself happy, merely because others think him so. In some Respects it were well if he could always be of this Opinion; and if the Belief of his Neighbours could really *make* him what they are so apt to *judge* him. But he feels their Error within his own Breast, which is not the more serene or quiet, for any outward Privileges cleaving to his Station or Fortune. Still he may have his Pursuits, the Suspence of which is as irksome to him, as the Man's can be, whose Views are lower, and upon the same Foot with his, as being yet depending. *Haman*, you may remember, could find no Rest in his highest Exaltation, whilst a *Mordecai* would not bend to him.

But, how pleasing soever such Obediences may prove, no one, surely, will think of them so magnificently, as to

fix the *Perfection* of Good upon such an insignificant and trifling Bottom. No one would have his Ease or Comfort depending upon the Fancy or the Humour of those, who, by withdrawing *their Homage*, might spoil *his Happiness*. No one, therefore, who views Things in a proper Light, would expect Satisfaction from any Incident or Circumstance turning upon mere Opinion. He would look for it rather in what is more solid, and less precarious, in the Peace of his own Mind, in the inestimable Treasure of a good Conscience, in a Disposition of Soul prepared for all Events, in the Knowledge and Love of God, and in an assured Hope of his precious Promises, thro' *Christ Jesus*.

Thus from the Survey we have taken of human Life, in its principal Stages, as well as in its chief Attainments and Pursuits, I presume it may appear, that whatever pretends to the Character of Perfection in it, hath its Boundaries and Limitations, that is, indeed, is very defective and imperfect. Now, to the Scantiness of all sublunary Good, the Law of  
God



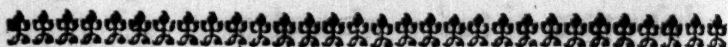
God was set in the Comparison; and this was the first Branch of my Text. The second would lead me to consider the Encomium given to this Law, which is founded here upon the Extent and Compass of it.

But as this will require another Discourse to finish it, I shall proceed at present no farther with it.





## SERMON IX.



PSALM CXIX. 96.

*I have seen an End of all Perfection; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*



THE Text hath already been observ'd to consist of two principal Branches.

I. The Character of somewhat to which the Law of God is compared: And this is the *Scantiness of all sublunary Perfection*; whose *End*, whose *Boundary*, whose determinate Measure and Period our Psalmist had seen and remark'd,

mark'd, in the Course of his own Experience. There was nothing so good, nothing so valuable, or so perfect in Life, but what had its proper Abate-ments upon this Survey and View of it.

II. The *second* Branch of the Text was said to be the Subject of the Comparison, with its proper Encomium; which is the Extent and Compass of Religion. Now

We have already consider'd the Character of the Thing to which the Law of God is compared, and have reflected upon the Scantiness of all sublunary Perfection;

1. In Gross and in General; from the known Beginning, Progress, and Conclusion of every Thing which is most esteemable in human Life;

2. From the Consideration of human Pursuits and Attainments. Here then we observ'd of its *Pursuits*, that they are very *laborious*, and at the same Time very *uncertain*; and of its Attainments, that whatsoever is valuable, or capable of forming a Pretence to Perfection in them,



them, must be either sensual, intellectual, or imaginary Good.

But as the Defects in each of these are easily perceivable, it will be impossible to frame a *perfect* Scheme from *any*, or from *all* of them. And therefore we have still a farther Resort, and this must be to the Law of God.

For tho' there be an *End* of *all* other *Perfection*, yet his *Commandment* is *exceeding broad*.

So that his Commandment hath somewhat belonging to it, which nothing here besides it hath. The *Breadth* of the one is set in Opposition to the *End* of the other. Wherefore as the *End* of all sublunary Perfection was meant to signify the Boundaries assign'd and the Limitations set to it; the *Scantiness*, the *Narrowness*, the *Emptiness*, the *Insufficiency*, or (if there be any other Word which will emphatically enough represent to us) the several Defects and Blemishes of temporal Goods; so the Extent and Compass of Religion, the Height, and Length, and Breadth, and Depth of it, are set in a Light of Comparison with these

these several Disadvantages. The one very *narrow* and contracted; the other very *broad* and comprehensive.

The latter Branch of the Comparison, which is an Encomium upon the Extent and Compass of Religion, is our present Subject.

This therefore we will consider more at large under the following Particulars: With regard

I. To the *Times* for *which* it is calculated.

II. To the Persons for *whom* it is fo.

III. To the several Circumstances of Life or Fortune which those Persons may be engaged in.

IV. With Reference to the *End* propounded by it.

V. To the *Means* by which that *End* is consulted in it.

In these several Respects we shall observe the *diffusive* Excellence of Religion; how *exceedingly broad* it is, and how utterly unconfined by any of those narrow Boundaries, which cramp and diminish the *Perfection* of all worldly Good.

I. *First*

I. *First* then we are to consider the Law of God with Regard to the *Times* for which it is calculated. For worldly Good is calculated only for the present Season, and in its highest Advances can reach no farther; nor will it always abide by the Possessor, even for this short Period; but makes it self Wings where-with it flies away, and abandons the Wretch who depended on it for his Happiness. Now, whatsoever Excellence there is otherwise in Religion, it hath this Addition, that no Man is at any Time in Life forsaken by it, without his Fault and Choice. If it be a real and proper Good, it hath this farther Advantage that it is an abiding one; and that no Man needs to fear the Loss of it, who is in any Measure careful to keep and to preserve it: Quite contrary to the Guise and Fashion of temporal Accommodations; the more a Man uses and resorts to it, the more it grows upon him. The Waters of Life are so far from any Danger of being exhausted by frequent drinking of them, that (like the Widow's Oyl which had the miracu-

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lous Care of Heaven to recruit it) their Stock is ever increasing, and their Fountain flows in the greater Abundance, the greater the Call is for them, and the larger the Draught which is taken of them; for the more the Acts of Religion are multiplied, the easier they proceed; and it is very well known in Practice, that one hath a notable Tendency to beget another. So far is it from being in any Manner probable, that Time should limit or stint the Progress of Religion, that the natural Tendency of Things promises quite another Consequence, and that the Man who hath been once acquainted with it, will *grow in Grace*, and will *go on unto Perfection*. At least it must always be his Fault, if his Improvements be not proportionable to his Beginnings; if the Seed which once hath taken Root in his Heart do not flourish abundantly in his after Practice, and spread its goodly Branches thro' all the remaining Stages of his Life. Whereas in the Case of temporal Advantages, no human Prudence nor Endeavour can always guard against unlucky

lucky Contingences. So that a Man may survive the best of them, and feel the Pinches of Thirst and Hunger, after the most sumptuous Fare, and the richest Diet. What our Saviour said to the Woman of *Samaria*, hath a Moral belonging to it which is perfectly coincident with our present Observation:

John iv.  
13, 14.

— *Jesus said unto her, whosoever drinketh of this Water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the Water which I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the Water which I shall give him, shall be in him a Well of Water springing up into everlasting Life.* Agreeable to which was the Blessing pronounced by him upon those who

Matt. v. 6.

*hungred and thirsted after Righteousness, that they should be filled.* And indeed with our present Helps 'tis impossible, that such Thirst and Hunger should ever fail of Satisfaction; the Materials in this Case are furnish'd by a liberal indulgent Providence; and we need but reach out our Hands to take of them; or open our Mouths to receive the Food of Heaven, and the Drink

Psal. xxxvi.  
8.

*which he gives us of his Pleasures as out of a Ri-*

*a River.* If we are true to our selves, and in earnest concern'd to maintain the Privilege of our Virtue, no Incidents of *Time* can impair or hurt it; it is an Estate for Life, of which no Contingences can deprive us, where we are not our selves consenting: And what gives it yet a farther and higher Commendation, is this, that even Life doth not limit it, that its Fruits and Consequences reach beyond the Grave, that it despises the scanty Reckonings of *Time*, and stretches into a boundless unmeasurable Eternity. Thus with regard to the *Times* for which it is calculated, the Law of God hath vastly the Advantage over any worldly Good. The one being only fitted to the present Scene, and even as to *that*, not at all ascertain'd; whilst the other is design'd for Continuance and Perpetuity, and it must be much our Fault, if it do not abide with us for ever. Again,

II. If we consider the Case of Religion with an Eye of Regard to the *Persons* concern'd in it, we shall find it infinitely



ly more *extensive*, than any Pursuit or Attainment of human Life. For

All Persons here are at Liberty to take their *fill* of it; and what one Man *gains* in it, is no *Loss* to another. But indeed the more it spreads, the more it is likely to do so; the more Adventurers there are in this Undertaking, the more, it is probable, will each Man's Share of Profit amount to: Because each Man's Example is a Light which shines for the Benefit of every Beholder; and the more such Lights there are, and the brighter they shine, the more is every Beholder either instructed, reminded, or provoked to trim his own Lamp, and to refresh his Oyl, and to improve the several Virtues, which contribute to make such a splendid Appearance. Whereas in the Scramble and Bustle of common Life, one Man's Attainments prove another's Disappointments; there being but a certain determinate Measure of good Things in it, *this* Man must have the *less*, because *that* Man hath *more*; or if all were equally in this Way provided, they who now have *most*, must submit  
to

to great Abatements and Defalcations, and when they had long been accustom'd to the higher Ground, would much complain of being brought upon a Level. Yet one or other of these must be the Fate of Mankind, upon the present Foot of this World's Accommodations; which are too narrow and scanty to reach the Wants or the Wishes of all who contend for them. There would indeed, or there need be, no Contest for them, if it were not that their Measure is limited, and so every Man catches at the Occasions which are presented to him, lest he should miss his Share of them. But now, I say, the whole rational Creation may alike engage in their Pursuits of Religion; and the higher their noble Emulation shall in this Way carry them, so much the more considerable will each of their Attainments be; no Man's Endeavours nor Successes will be found Hindrances to another's; but *in pressing forwards to the Mark of the Prize of their high Calling*, each will assist the Progress of his Neighbour; there are Prizes for *all*, and many Man-

sions to receive even the greatest Numbers which shall seek Admission. By contending earnestly for this Recompence of Reward, each Competitor will find his own Advances forwarded by those behind him, and excited and quicken'd by those before him. And were the *Practice* of Religion as extensive as its *Precepts*, whatsoever can now pretend to the Character of a good Thing in Life, would then become much better; the great Allays of our present Happiness, which are founded pretty much on our Breaches or Neglects of Virtue, would be struck off from it; we should taste it then in more and higher Perfection, should have less to complain of, and a richer Fund of Enjoyments. For indeed

III. In all Conditions and Circumstances of Life, as well as to *all* Persons in it, Religion is of signal Use and Benefit.

Worldly Good can, at most, but gratify that particular Appetite which sets our several Powers at work to obtain it.  
Nor



Nor are we able in one, of very many Instances, to gain even this small Point; but after much Labour in vain, we sit down where we were, and like Strangers wandring in the Dark over a mighty Plain, we find, when Light appears, that we have not advanced an Inch of our Way, by all our Toil and Travail. But, I say, when our Progress is most successful, we make but little by it towards our general Point of Happiness. What is the Object of this or that particular Desire, if it satisfies *that*, hath done its utmost, and can do no more for us. But a great deal more remains behind, to finish our intended Project, and to make us what we would be. We succeed, perhaps, in one and another Pursuit; and when we have gained one Heighth, we thence are enabled to descry a second, which from the lower Ground was unobserved by us. So that we gain nothing by our former Attainment besides a little Breathing-time from Labour, which is soon renew'd, and so we proceed in Life thro' various Endeavours to satisfy this and that Inclination, which, upon the Foot

of our Account will be found to have given us as much at lowest of Disquiet, as they have done of Pleasure. For the Pursuits of Life are often clashing and interfering, and a Man cannot take any Steps towards one of them, but another suffers by it; and what in this or that Condition of our Affairs, is agreeable and pleasing to us, in a different Posture of them, hath no Relish. One Passion, perhaps, we find Means of regaling, whilst another is mortified with the Want of proper Entertainment. What we much court and value in the Days of our Youth, grows tasteless and insipid to us, when the *Years draw nigh*, in which we are apt to complain, that *we have no Pleasure*. Thus partial and scanty is worldly Good, even in its best Perfection; so lame and defective is the Provision made by it, towards answering the general Demand, or supplying the several Wants which it undertakes to satisfy.

But now there is no Circumstance of Life to which Religion doth not extend its beneficial Influences; and every Man who will resort to it, may find himself  
the

the better for it, whatsoever be the Posture which his Affairs may stand in. In the Felicities of a prosperous State, Religion removes those Draw-backs and Abatements from our Happiness, wherewith the want of it cannot but clog our most delectable Enjoyments. For surely no Man, not utterly destitute of Forecast or Reflection, can take much Pleasure in a Situation which will neither suffer him to look backwards nor forwards with any tolerable Comfort, but holds him intent upon the present Point of View, keeps all his Powers contracted within that narrow Compass, plies him still with new Intoxications, and never delivers him from his enchanted Bondage. If at any Time he should chance to look *behind* him, the Remembrance of past Enjoyments can give him no present Satisfaction, but Remorse and Bitterness are their known Attendants; if he looks *forwards*, the Prospect is overcast with cloudy Presages and fearful Expectations. This must be every Man's Case who hath taken no Care to mend it, by the Aids



and Succours of Religion, which would easily, I say, remove from him these Abatements of his Happiness. He might look *back* without *Pain* upon Pleasures enjoy'd within the Rules of Innocence and Virtue, and *forwards* without *Fear*, if he were secure of Futurity that it could not hurt him. And thus his *present* Felicities would sit upon him the easier, as having no Allay to sour them, no base unhappy Mixture to tarnish *their* Purity, nor to put *his* Palate out of taste with them. But otherwise, he must owe all his Ease and Comfort in Life to want of Thought and Sense. And these are surely Comforts more apt to raise the Pity, than the Envy of every Man who can distinguish between Good and Evil. The Effects of great Ignorance or of great Imprudence, can never be truly valuable: Nor can the most pleasing Images of a Delirium, how numerous or lasting soever they may be, pass in any rational Account, for desirable Entertainments; and what is there really better in those delusive Enjoyments which amuse for a while a fantastical Appetite

Appetite, and lead afterwards to Death and Destruction? They bear no more Proportion to the Eternity we were made for, than the Phrenzies of a Fever bear to the whole of Life; and will have, in the Result of Things, as little to be pleaded for them; with this great Aggravation, that we fell into them more deliberately, that they had our Choice along with them, that we had our Reason at hand to have fenced against them, and that we were caught in the Snare with our Eyes open, and in the broadest Day-light. What our Saviour said once to the *Pharisees*, is fairly applicable to the present Occasion. If (said he) *Ye were blind, ye should have no Sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your Sin remaineth.* Again, Joh ix. 41.

In the Calamities of Life, as well as in the more prosperous Circumstances of it, Religion is known to be of signal Service. Now these, after all Endeavours which can be used to avoid them, are as often the Lot of the Wicked, as they are of the Righteous: For tho' a Man's Principles may now and then expose him

him to some Hardships in Life, yet it may be affirm'd with great Truth and Justice, that the Vices of Men do much oftener thus expose them; so that where Religion betrays *one* Man into Misfortunes, the want of it betrays *Numbers*. And then in these rare Instances, the Supports of Religion have a peculiar Power to bear up the Spirit of a Man, and to sustain him under all Infirmities; *but a wounded Spirit who can bear?* Who can stand under the Weight of those Pressures which he hath brought upon himself thro' a Course of Wickedness? who hath impaired his Health, or wasted his Fortune by those very Practices, which have made Shipwreck of his Conscience also? What Resources then remain to him in such a Complication of unhappy Circumstances? when no Part of him is left free in Aid or Comfort of the other; when (as the Prophet speaks) *the whole*

Isa. i. 5, 6. *Head is sick, and the whole Heart faint; when from the Sole of the Foot even unto the Head, there is no Soundness in him; but Wounds and Bruises and putrifying Sores; which have not been closed, neither bound*

2 up,



*up, neither mollified with Ointment?* This is, indeed, the forest Aggravation of all Misfortunes, and the Sting of each Calamity is pointed hence with a peculiar Sharpness.

But even in those promiscuous Dispensations of Good and Evil, which run throughout the World, and are allotted in common to the Righteous and the Wicked; there is a very great Diversity between their respective Preparations for receiving the one and the other. We have already observed how well Religion disposes Men for the Enjoyments of Life, and have now to add, how well it qualifies them for sustaining its Misfortunes. Patience is a known and approved Lenitive, which disarms Adversity of its most envenom'd Weapon; and is a Lesson which Religion directs us to learn, and hath shewn us the fairest Pattern, in the Example of him who *was led as a Lamb to the Slaughter, and as a Sheep before her Shearers is dumb, so he opened not his Mouth.* It is, indeed, the Discomposure of our Passions, which enrages

Isa. liii. 7.

enrages our Sense of unfavourable and cross Accidents; we let out our Hopes or our Fears too loose to them; we place too much to the Account of our Expectations from them; and thence, upon the Result of Things, we feel ourselves a good deal disappointed, even in our best Successes; and when we quite miscarry, the Weight of the Calamity oversets and sinks us. And to this must be added, that the Men who have no Hope beyond the Grave, are of all Men most miserable, when on this Side of it they meet with no agreeable Entertainment.

But now let Things move as they will upon the present Scene, and take the Fate which the various Chances of Life shall give them, the Men of Religion have ventured less upon this Bottom, and therefore are less concerned in the Storms and Tempests of an unfavourable Season. Their Affections are better regulated, and therefore they receive with a more equal Frame of Mind the several Ruffles and Shocks which they encounter in their Passage thro' a

Vale of Misery: They have a View beyond it, which supports and comforts them in the worst of their Way, cools and refreshes them in the hottest Part of their Service. For what is it to a Man who is making to a Haven of everlasting Rest, who keeps it always in his Eye, and never loses Sight of it; if he be toss'd for some Time upon the Waves, before he can reach it? He will feel, it is confess'd, the Discomposure of these several Agitations; but they will give him surely the less Uneasiness, for the Assurance he hath that all will end well, and that he shall be brought at last in Safety *to the Haven where he would be.* He can support himself certainly much better under his present Complaints, than the Man can do, who with the same Cause of Complaint, the same Sense of Pain and Trouble, hath none of his Alleviations nor Resources, no Assurances that any thing will follow, but what is much worse than his present Sufferings; no Hope of an advantageous Exchange, but instead of it a *fearful looking for of Judgment.*

Finally,



Finally, in the middle Posture of Life, which is not much distinguish'd either by Adversity or<sup>d</sup> Prosperity, Religion hath at least an equal Advantage with any belonging to it, in either of the preceding Circumstances. For this is, indeed, the Posture which most exposes Men to the restless Pursuits of Ambition, and thence to the Torments of disappointed Hope. But now Religion will teach them to be either content with their present Station, or to be easy under the Result of those Endeavours which are used to get above it; will not, however, suffer them to vitiate the Taste of their present Enjoyments, by extravagant Excursions into future Prospects, nor by suspending their Happiness upon Events and Incidents which they can by no Means govern. These are the vain Attempts of the dissatisfied and discontented; the preposterous over-heated Pursuits of Men, who ruine what they are most fond of by being too fond of it, and cannot taste what they have, because they imagine they have not enough of it. Were this a proper Time or Occasion  
for

for entering upon the Enquiry what Condition of Life and Fortune is generally most eligible, the middle State, which is above Contempt and beneath Envy, would have, I conceive, as much to be pleaded for it, and as few Objections against it as either of the other. And Religion would make it still more desirable, by instructing those who are planted in it, to submit with all Humility, to such as are above them, and to condescend with all Readiness to them of a low Estate. Such a Frame of Mind would strike off a great Part of the Temptations, which push Men forwards, and will not suffer them to be easy in their present Posture; they would rather wait for the opening of fair Occasions, than labour to force a Passage; and thence would avoid much of the Anxiety, which attends laborious uncertain Pursuits, much of the Guilt which is often contracted by too close a Scent, and of the Mischiefs which follow the Purchase of such Attainments.

Thus extensive is Religion to all Times, to all Persons, and to all the Circum-

Circumstances of human Life. We are farther now, and

IV. *Fourthly*, To consider it, with Reference to the End propounded by it; which is no less than the Happiness of *this Life, and of that which is to come*; for *Godliness* (we are told) *hath the Promises of both*; in *this Conditional*, in *that Unexceptionable*. Even as to *this*, it hath in the General much fairer Prospects, than its contrary. For tho' it is not directly nor absolutely entitled to the Felicities of this World, yet it hath the sure Favour of Heaven to whatever is fit for its sincere Votaries. And when the Issue of Things (which nothing but an apparent Miracle could over-bear) proves unfavourable; the *Duties* of *Godliness* will then instruct them to endure with Patience the Suspence of their *Rewards*. And by so instructing them, will provide more amply for their Ease and Happiness, than by the most indulgent Condescension to their most craving Desires. For our Fancies and Appetites are humourfome and liquorish, and 'tis in vain to expect they should be quieted  
or



or silenced by any Measure of Condescension to them. So that whatever brings down our Desires to the Measure of our Enjoyments, does really consult our Happiness more effectually than any Scheme which would raise our Enjoyments to the full Measure of our Desires. The former Scheme is practicable, the latter impossible; or if not always impossible, yet usually improper. We may make however what Experiments we please, provided always that we confine them within the Rules of Virtue and Integrity. But the Resignation of the Issue is at once our Duty and our Happiness. In this Way of judging and of calculating, the ordinary Course of Things could never make the Man of Religion miserable. For in Adversity we have already observ'd he hath great Resources, which none but he can have any Pretence or Claim to. Yet this his Hope is only at last subordinate, and less ascertain'd to him; he hath a farther and a nobler View, which is better assured to him, and enters within the Veil.

Upon

Upon the former Estimate, he stands at least as fair for the Felicities of Life, as the Man who hath no Hope beyond it; when he hath them, he can enjoy them with fewer Abatements, and can bear the Want of them with a more contented and easy Spirit.

But if we form our Judgement of the one and of the other, upon those different Issues which wait them respectively when this Life is ended, there is then no room for a Comparison; for between Life and Death, between Happiness and Misery, between Time and Eternity, there is just as much Proportion, as there is between the several Views of the Righteous and the Wicked. Now whatever the subordinate Expectations of good Men may be, this is certainly the proper *End of their Faith*; which can never therefore be named in the Comparison with any lower Prospects, except it be to illustrate its superior Worth. For supposing the Advantages of this Life to be equally, or well-nigh equally open to the several Endeavours of the Righteous and the Wicked,

Wicked, we must surely adjudge the Preference, where there is so reasonable, so vast a Prospect beyond this Life, which the one hath all imaginable Title, the other no Sort nor Colour of Pretence to. Let us therefore in the

V. *Fifth* and last Place, consider the *Means* by which the *End* of Religion is consulted. For, if, as its *End* is far the *noblest* and the greatest of any propounded in human Life, so the *Means* which profess to lead to it be likewise *surest*; the Conclusion of all must be, that Religion is the wisest Course which any Man can betake to for his proper Happiness. Now here, I think, even the Disputer against the *End* of Religion, (he I mean who from I know not what imaginary Possibilities, would dispute its Certainty) must, however, agree the Fitness of the *Means* to it. And let him name, if he can, any one Pursuit or Project in Life, whose *End* is more certainly attainable than the *End* of Religion is; or which hath a greater Evi-



dence of Reason to assure it. But the *Means*, I am persuaded, he will not dispute; he will not suggest the least Impropriety or Unlikelihood in them, for attaining the *End* to which they are directed. If a pure and just and merciful Being hath designed us for Happiness, no Man certainly will deny, that Purity, Justice and Mercy must be the best Recommendations of us to his Favour. So that whatsoever Evidence of Sense may be pretended, for the Certainty of any Thing relating to our present Life, amounts in reality to no more than this, that there is a Possibility of obtaining it: Now will any Man undertake to determine on the other Side of the Question, that there is not a like Possibility of obtaining the End of our Faith? Will any Man presume to say, that the Means to any Project for this World, have not the Evidence of Sense to convince him of their being disappointed in manifold Examples? And will he at the same Time adventure to affirm, that he hath ever known (he or his Forefather from the Beginning of the

the World) that the *Means* of Religion have missed their *End*? No! this is too much for the most hardy Disputant to suggest or intimate. So that there is nothing at last but blind and brutal Appetite, which hath any Objection to the superior Excellence of Religion. Its *End* being incomparably greater, its *Means* unquestionably leading to it with a far greater Certainty, than any *End* which is calculated but for a momentary Continuance; or any *Means* which human Prudence can find out to promote it.

Where then shall we look for the Foundation of that undue Preference, which, in Fact, is given to the Things of this World before those of the other? Where, but in the Dominion of our Passions, and in the Power of our Lusts? Upon *Principle* it can never be defended! *Reason* hath not a Word to say for it, but what must acknowledge its own Defects and Failures, and plead it self at the same Time too passive and compliant. Wherefore, if we have any becoming Sense of the Dignity cleaving to a rational

nal Nature, any ingenious Apprehension of what we were made for, what we were born to, what God and *Christ* have condescended to invite, to persuade, to contrive for us to come into; let the Ties of Interest, Gratitude and Honour engage us to close with the Offers of such great Salvation.

There is no such Thing as Perfection in this Life; nor any Pretence to it which can or ought to apologize for our Neglects of the other. The Interests of *both* may possibly be consistent; and are the more likely to be so, for our seeking in the first Place, the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness. But if Conjunctions should be such that there must be a Sacrifice of either; let Reason, let Religion, let the End of our Faith, let the Salvation of our Souls be first consider'd; and let all lower Interests take the Fate which these higher Events shall severally leave to them. Remembring always, that a Man will be nothing *profited*, *who shall gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul*; that when once he hath lost it, he will never



ver be able to redeem it; and that no Equivalent will be accepted, which he can give in *Exchange* for it.

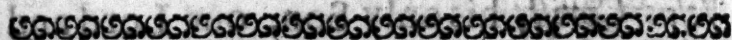
May God of his infinite Mercy grant us the Spirit to think and do always such Things as be rightful; so to pass thro' Things temporal, that we finally lose not the Things eternal! Which we beg in the Name, and thro' the Mediation of *Jesus Christ*, his only Son, our Lord and Saviour.

Q<sub>3</sub>

SERMON



## SERMON X.



PSALM XXVI. 12.

*My Foot standeth in an even Place :  
in the Congregations will I bless  
the Lord.*

Or, according to the Version of our Psalter, thus:

*My Foot standeth right : I will praise  
the Lord in the Congregations.*



THE Context will readily give us a Key for opening the true Intent and Purport of the Text. The whole Design of the Psalm was lodging an Appeal with God, for the Integrity

Integrity of its holy Author's Heart and Conduct. *Be thou my Judge, faith he, O Lord, for I have walked innocently. All Fellowship with the Vain and Deceitful* he disclaims at the fourth Verse; and at the eleventh he places all his Confidence in God, as a merciful Redeemer, upon the Consciousness of having *walked in his Integrity*: And thus reflecting with Pleasure upon the Advantage of such a favourable Situation, his Foot standing thus right upon Ground so smooth and even, with nothing to clog, nothing to encumber or entangle him, he thought himself *privileged*, as well as *obliged* by it, to praise and bless the Lord in the Assemblies of his Saints, in the Congregations of his faithful Servants for the Purposes of religious Worship.

The Foot, the Instrument of Motion, is here transferred by an easy Figure, from a *natural* to a *moral* Meaning; and in this latter Sense it takes in the whole Turn and Conduct of Life: Thus the *Ways* of a Man denote his Doings and his Dealings; the Affections which govern



vern him, and the Actions proceeding from them.

Mark upon this Occasion the Advice of the Royal Preacher; *Keep thy Foot,* Ecclef.v.i. (saith he) *when thou goest to the House of God; i. e.* Be careful of thy whole Behaviour.

With much like Views my Text hath intimated, the great and leading Qualification for paying to God an acceptable Worship; his *Foot* must *stand right* who pays it; his whole Demeanor must be directed by the Influences of Religion, by an awful Regard to the Authority of the great Creator and Law-giver of the World. All Religions have insisted upon what they severally esteemed and reputed *Holiness*, in the Persons admitted to their most solemn Offices; which is an Argument, that the Foundation of the Thing is laid in Nature and in common Sense. For indeed to approach the Object of our Worship, with the Guilt of Dispositions or of Actions repugnant to his Will, is a Solecism in Practice, Reason choaks at it, and there is more Appearance of Mockery,

ry, than of any serious Homage meant by it.

Hence, in all the various Forms and Ceremonials of Heathen Superstition, a nice Regard was evermore paid to the supposed Inclinations of their respective Deities ; there was a Preparation of Heart, and a Conformity of Practice to what was esteemed most agreeable, where they meant to please; the *View* was *right*, tho' the *Measures* taken for pursuing it were *wrong* and mis-shapen; they *rightly* judged that they must aim at *Resemblance*, where they hoped for *Favour and Acceptance*. But their *Error* was, that they too often mistook the Likeness which they endeavour'd to come up with, created for themselves unauthorized Objects of religious Worship, painted them according to their own Imaginations, and so laboured a Likeness to them from a false and fictitious Copy.

Christians may easily avoid such mistaken Estimates of the God adored by them ; who may see him described to them in such lively Colours, and his moral Perfections (which alone are capable

pable of Imitation) so fairly drawn for them, in the Book of his own enditing.

There they may find him the God of Love, Plenteous in Goodness, Mercy, Truth, Righteousness, Purity, Holiness, and in every moral Excellence. So that they can be at no Loss for the great Lines of Duty or of what will please him. Wherefore if he hath farther discovered to them the Means and the Forms of approaching him with Acceptance in the Offices of religious Worship; they have nothing to do, but to walk in the Way which he hath taught them with Care and Diligence, and may expect with Confidence, a favourable Issue.

Their Feet *standing right*; they may appeal to him, as a *Judge*; they may resort to him as a *Father*; they may hold Communion with him in religious Offices; they may *worship him in the Beauty of Holiness*; they may *praise him in the Assembly of the Upright*; they may *compass his Altar*; they may *bless him in the Congregations*.

That they are *fit* to do it, and that none besides them are so, will be the  
Points



Points which I shall endeavour to establish in the Sequel of this Discourse.

I. The first Point then which we are to settle, will be this; That Holiness of Life is a very *proper* Qualification for all who would worship God, with any Hope of Acceptance from him.

II. The *Second* will lead us to observe, That it is an *essential*, as well as a *proper* Qualification for all Resorts to him in religious Offices, without which those Resorts are impertinent, useless, and affrontive.

I. Let us consider Holiness of Life, as a very *proper* Qualification for all who would worship God with any Hope of Acceptance from him. Now let it be observed upon this, that Holiness is the only Circumstance which can liken us to God. He is *righteous in all his Ways*, and *holy in all his Works*; his *Commandments* also *are holy and just and good*. Wherefore, when he sees a Soul approaching him in the Ardors of holy Devotion, *cleansed, tho' not according to the Purification*

*tion of his Sanctuary, or the exact Measures of a spotless Obedience, yet purged from all grosser Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, and labouring to perfect Holiness in his Fear; doubtless, he will acknowledge in it those fainter Degrees of his own inimitable Likeness, which may dispose him to bear and help from his dwelling Place; to send out his Light and his Truth, that they may lead and direct it, to cheer and enlighten it by his favourable Presence, and to espouse its Interests with all the wise Tenderness of a merciful Father. For,*

Can he, who is *Good to all*, and whose *tender Mercies are over all his Works*, despise or neglect the humble Endeavours of his Creatures, who have not forfeited their Title to his Favour by any wilful Act of Departure from the God of their Righteousness, and the Rock of their Salvation? Who, if they might, would, in all Points be what they conceive it is his Will they should be, without falling in any Tittle short of it? Who shape, as well as they can, the Model of their Actions, by the Standard of his Nature,

transcribed

transcribed into his Law? The *Father of all Flesh*, they may be well assured, means no such Hardship to them! The *Spirit of Adoption*, which entitles them his *Sons and Heirs*, bids him go with Confidence to the *Throne of Grace*, where they may be sure of attaining all proper *Help in the Time of Need*. They can have no reasonable Ground of distrusting those infinite Mercies, which are ever ready to flow down from the Creator upon the Creature, where there is no Incapacity in the Creature, for receiving the full Amount of them. But now a Creature resembling God in all those Perfections, wherein he is made and fitted to resemble him, maintaining as he can, and as far as human Frailty will permit him, the Stamp of his Maker's Image upon his Soul, undefaced and inviolate, and mounting aloft upon the Wings of Faith and holy Devotion, to the Throne and Presence of his heavenly Father; such an one, I say, can have no Reception there, but what shall be inviting and encouraging: There is nothing to stop him in his Approaches, nor to intercept



intercept the Light of God's Countenance, or the Beams of his Favour from shining in upon him with a propitious Lustre. The Searcher of Hearts discerns no fatal Blemish in him, no Soil contracted in this Body of Sin, but what the putting off this Body of Sin will remove from him, and entirely free him from the Burden and Incumbrance of it. Now where there is no Impediment on the Part of *Man*, on *God's* Part there is always a Readiness to be and to do Good. The *Hearer of Prayer* is his favourite Character, when he can hear it with Honour, and without Disparagement to his Laws. Thus then, if we look for him in *Holiness*, we may behold his *Power and Glory*. If we are *pure in Heart* we may see him here in his Sanctuary, and hereafter in the full and unveiled Majesty of his Kingdom.

It will easily pass undisputed with us, that these are very *proper* Qualifications for the Worship of God; and therefore I shall no longer labour the Proof of their being so.

But many (if we may judge of their  
Opinions

*Opinions* from the Tenor of their *Practices* seem to think that a good deal may be abated out of this Account; that howsoever *proper* or *expedient* it may be, that they should be *holy in all Manner of Conversation*, who pretend to hold a Communion with God in religious Offices; yet that it is not so *necessary*, nor so *essential*, but that a Relaxation may be well allowed of; and therefore they are not afraid to come with their Sins about them, nor to bring along with them the noisom Stench of their Lusts and Passions, into the *House of Prayer*, and even to his *holy Altar*; to call him *Lord, Lord*, without any suitable Care to *do the Things which he hath said*; to rush into the Presence-Room of the King of Heaven with Irreverence and Neglect; to address him there with Indifference and Formality, without considering that he is a *Discerner of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart*, that *he is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity*, that the Sanctity of his Nature will not bear with it, that the Wisdom of his Government will not dispense with it; that he can instantly  
and

and terribly avenge the presumptuous and rude Approaches of those thoughtless Sinners, who *draw near to him with their Lips*, when their *Hearts are far from him*.

These Things, I say, are not enough considered nor regarded, in the ordinary Process of Life, nor in the usual Observance which is paid to religious Offices. 'Tis thought sufficient, and a great Point, 'tis believed, is gained by it, if any Observance is paid to them, in the common Forms, and in their stated Seasons: If God hath then that Compliment of our Homage and Lip-Labour, if he hath some little Solemnities of Mien and Countenance, of Posture and Gesture offered to him in his Worship; the Round of these Performances will atone (it then is hoped) for a Round of Vanity and Folly, of Indulgence to every favourite, tho' sinful Inclination, and for a Life, in the main Bent and Tenor of it, devoted to the World, and void of all Sense of its Dependence on the God who gave it.

That we may therefore meet with this spreading,



spreading pernicious Error, which, if it be not often avowed in *Principles*, prevails, I fear, too frequently in *Practice*. Proceed we to observe upon our

II. *Second General*, That Holiness of Life is an *essential*, as well as a *proper* Qualification for all Resorts to God in religious Offices; without which they are impertinent, useless and affrontive.

There is but one Exception to this Remark, which yet is more so in Appearance, than it is in Reality. The Penitent's Case is what I have in View, when I point at any Exception to our present Rule. Now the very Name of solemn *Repentance* supposes and implies in it a past Want of *Holiness*, and a Breach of the Laws enjoin'd by it, in some flagrant Example, either one or more. Here it would be hard and unjustifiable to pronounce of such a Man, that all Approaches to God for Pardon and Forgiveness are forbidden him: Yet it is certain that the *Publican* (whose Manner of Address to the Throne of Grace is recorded with Honour in the Gospel) Luk. xviii. 13, 14.

*stood, at first, afar off, and would not lift up so much as his Eyes unto Heaven; but smote upon his Breast, saying, God be merciful to me a Sinner.* Well he seems to have been apprized, that all nearer Intercourses with Heaven, would have been rude and affrontive, whilst the Guilt of his Sins was fresh upon him, whilst the Wounds of them were green and bleeding, and his Conscience not yet sufficiently purged with that Hyssop which should cleanse him. He therefore made his Approaches with Reserve and Diffidence, and aim'd as yet at no farther Privilege than that of an humble, penitential Acknowledgment that he had forfeited all Right to any nearer Admission.

And thus the Church of *Christ*, whilst she retained any Power over her Members, proceeded ever with all infamous Delinquents. She allowed none of them to approach her most solemn Ordinances, till, by a Course of gradual Austerities, they had manifested their Recovery of that Holiness which their Sins had lost: Nor were they mean while admitted to any, even the lowest Parts in her religious  
.. Offices,

Offices, 'till there appeared in them some pregnant Tokens of their Sorrow for the Forfeiture of their Privilege, of their ardent Desires to retrieve and re-establish it, and of their present Bent towards that Holiness, which alone could prepare their Hearts for the Service of God. So that Holiness, either in *future Purpose*, or in *present Practice*, was ever esteemed by her a necessary Term of Communion with her. 'Twas a Discipline established on the earliest Precedents, founded upon the Authority of inspired Writers, and believed essential to the Well-being and good Government of the Christian Commonwealth: The same, indeed, had been before the *Notions and Practices* of the *Jewish Church* upon this Particular: Nor would even the Pagan Religion admit its Votaries to the most solemn Offices of the Worship prescribed by it, without a previous and publick Proclamation, that \**Holy Things* are fit for *Holy Persons*; that all the † *Profane* (i. e. all who had not rightly prepared them-

\* *Αγιος αγιος.*

† *Procul, ô procul este, Profani*

R 2

selves



selves for the Celebration of its holy Myſteries) ſhould keep a due Diſtance from them.

The *Reason* of the Caſe is founded in the *Nature* of the Thing; and therefore the Extent of the Perſuaſion was *general* among all who thought of it. For, to proceed now more directly upon the Point before us, if we look into the juſt Foundations of Divine Worſhip, upon the Views either of natural or revealed Religion, we ſhall eaſily diſcern the *Necceſſity*, as well as the *Propriety* of this Condition, why Holineſs of Life on the Part of Man, is eſſential to the Acceptance of any Service which he can pay to God.

If, indeed, in our Addreſſes to God, we had any Views of acquainting him with our Wants, of raiſing in his pure impaſſible Mind any ſort of Compaſſion to them, or of gaining any Point from him, by the mere Recital of the Praiſes due to his ever-glorious Name; ſuch Views as theſe might poſſibly ('tis confeſſed) be answered, without any ſuitable Care of conforming ourſelves to his Im-

age,

age, or of transcribing his Perfections into our Lives and Actions. But then these are Views which are utterly unworthy of his Nature and his Attributes.

For, alas ! he knows our Wants much better than we do, and therefore cannot by any Notices from us be better inform'd of them, than he is already. He is good and gracious to all his Creatures, and of himself inclin'd to the Relief of their several Necessities, without any Possibility of suffering the least Change in his Dispositions from our utmost Importunities. He is infinitely in himself sufficient for his own Happiness, and therefore needs no Remembrancer to tell him how great, or righteous, or merciful he is, nor to excite in him any pleasing Reflections upon his own Blessedness or Glory.

These are Views, which suppose Infirmary and Passion in the Object they relate to; and we *think wickedly* of God, when we imagine him to be *such an one* as ourselves.

All our Prayers to, and our Praises of him, have at Bottom quite another

R 3

Meaning,

Meaning, and are designed to answer much different Purposes. They are not enjoin'd us for the sake of that great All-perfect Being; to whom with our purest and best-meant Services we cannot at last be *profitable*; but they are prescribed to us *for our own Use* and Benefit, that by the Addresses we put up to him, and by the Acknowledgments we make him, we may cherish and improve the Sense we have of our dependent Condition, that it was he *who made us*, and *not we ourselves*; that it is he who sustains and preserves us, and *holds up our Goings in Life*; that it is he *who openeth his Hand*, and *filleteth us with Good*; that we came out of his Hands, and must return again to them, and must account to his Providence for the Use we have made of his several Vouchsafements.

I say, the preserving in us a Remembrance of these important Truths, and the Settlement of them into an habitual Persuasion, is the first, the nearest and most immediate Design of the Worship which God expects from us; and this will help us to a Reason why he hath so often represented



presented himself in Accommodation to our Capacities, as a *jealous God*, as one who will not part with the *Glory due unto his Name*, nor give his *Honour to another*; because the fixing our Dependence upon a *wrong Foundation* would be fatal to the main Reason and End of our Worship, which is fixing our Dependence upon a *right* and a *proper Bottom*. Now, even this hath also a farther View in it.

Little would it signify, where, or upon whom, we should think ourselves depending, except for the Tendency which such Apprehensions have to secure our Obedience, where we confess it due: Nor is this Obedience itself of any real Importance to the God we pay it to, any farther than as it is inconsistent with the Schemes of his Government and Providence, to admit us to a State of *Happiness*, without a previous Life of *Holiness*. All, you see, centers there, and in that single Point; for otherwise he might well expostulate with us, as *Eliphas* did with *Job*; *Is it* Job xxii.  
*any Pleasure to the Almighty that thou art* <sup>23.</sup>  
*righteous? Or is it Gain to him, that thou*

Job xxxv.  
6, 7, 8.

*makest thy Ways perfect? Or, again, in the Words of Elibu; If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? Or if thy Transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth he of thine Hand? Thy Wickedness, indeed, may hurt a Man as thou art; and thy Righteousness may profit the Son of Man.*

It being then the main Intention of all the Worship we can pay to God, to lodge with us a Sense of our Dependence upon him for all we have, and for all we hope for; and this also having a farther View in it, of securing our Obedience to his holy Commandments, and thence of providing effectually for our final Happiness; these, I say, in Conjunction being the fundamental Reasons of our Worship, it is easy to perceive from them the Insignificance and Absurdity of all religious Approaches to the great Object of it, without a Heart and Life correspondent to its primary Meaning, and to its chief Design.

For to confess our Dependence, when  
we

we are trampling upon his holy Laws, is to aggravate our Offence, by adding Insolence to our Iniquity, and Presumption to our Sin: It speaks this practical Language, which I would not recite but to shew you how shocking that would be in *Words*, which yet passes in *Deeds* without any Disquietude or Horror in the Actor. “ O God, I am thy Creature, the Work of thy *Hands*, which  
“ *made and fashioned me; thro’ thee have*  
“ *I been holden up ever since I was born,*  
“ *thou art he that took me out of my Mother’s Womb*; and without the Continuance of thy Grace and Favour to  
“ me I am lost for ever. To thee, and  
“ to thy righteous Commandments I  
“ owe all possible Obedience; they are  
“ *holy, and just, and good* as thou art,  
“ fit to be observed by me, and every  
“ way necessary to the good Order and  
“ Government of the World, which thou  
“ hast created for my Use and Benefit. But  
“ yet I beseech thee do not expect that  
“ this Obedience should have any Hold  
“ of me, that these thy Commandments  
“ should have any Observance from me,  
“ where



“ where I am not inclin’d to pay it. Do  
 “ not expect from me any farther Ser-  
 “ vice, than what may pass in Form;  
 “ in good Words and in fair Acknow-  
 “ ledgments, which shall come in great  
 “ Plenty from me, if they may serve  
 “ instead of what I find more difficult,  
 “ the Sacrifice of my Lusts and Passions,  
 “ and a Life in all Points devoted to  
 “ thy Service. *If thousands of Rams, or*  
 “ *ten thousands of Rivers of Oil,* will com-  
 “ mute for the eternal Duties of Truth  
 “ and Righteousness, and moral Excel-  
 “ lence; behold thy Servant ready to  
 “ answer thy very largest Demands:  
 “ But then I beseech thee to insist upon  
 “ none of those Duties which alone de-  
 “ serve thy Notice and Regard, for their  
 “ intrinsic Worth. Discharge me from  
 “ all Obligations, which are in them-  
 “ selves of any real Importance, and  
 “ the rest I will be careful to perform,  
 “ with the utmost Punctuality.”

The *Sound* of such an Address as this  
 would, doubtless, be shocking to the  
*Ears* of those, who yet have all the *Sense*  
 of it in their *Hearts*, and who practise  
 upon

upon it throughout their whole Behaviour. They will confess their Dependence, whilst they are regardless of their Obedience; they will nauseate, and even choak you with their officious Diligence in the customary Forms of Godliness, whilst they have no Care at Heart of copying after their Maker's Image; of reaching the true Spirit of Religion, or of attaining to its Life and Power. They will acknowledge God to be a Lover of Righteousness, and sing the Praises of his Truth and Goodness with delicious Harmony, whilst themselves, perhaps, are *unrighteous and full of Deceit, Haters of, and hated by, one another*. God forbid that this Case should be general; I mean not to suggest it is so; but I mean to remind you all of the Danger which attends it, and of the Folly wherewith it is chargeable, wherever in fact it is truly chargeable. For, in fine, there is no Inconsistency more glaring, no Absurdity more monstrous, no Insolence more shocking, no Affront to God more outrageous, than what is imply'd in those ill-match'd Words, with those ill-coupled

Ideas

Ideas belonging to them, a wicked Worshiper.

Iſa. i. 12,  
Ec.

To ſuch Men as theſe the Sarcasm and the Menace of God by his Prophet and his Preacher come pointed with all their Force. *When ye ſo appear before, who hath required this at your Hands, that ye ſhould tread my Courts? Bring no more vain Oblations; Incenſe is an Abomination to me, the New Moons and Sabbaths, the Calling of Aſſemblies I cannot away with, it is Iniquity, even their ſolemn meeting. Your New Moons, and your appointed Feaſts my Soul hateth; they are a Trouble unto me, I am weary to hear them.*

*Waſh ye, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes; Cease to do Evil, learn to do well; ſeek Judgment, relieve the Oppreſſed, judge the Fatherleſs, plead for the Widow.*

Prov. i. 24,  
Ec.

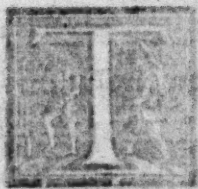
But becauſe I have called, and ye reſuſed, I have ſtretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded; ye have ſet at nought all my Counſels, and would none of my Reproof; I alſo will laugh at your Calamity, I will mock when your Fear cometh.

Now



Now that no Part of this severe Ex-  
postulation may with any Propriety be  
applied to us, let us pray, that

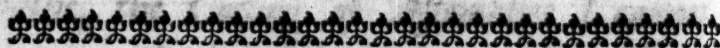
*The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and  
the Love of God, and the Fellowship  
of the Holy Ghost may be with us all,  
evermore.*



**SERMON**



# SERMON XI.



## PSALM V. 7.

*But as for me, I will come into thy  
House in the Multitude of thy  
Mercy; and in thy Fear will I  
worship towards thy holy Temple.*



THE Psalm was composed by *David* upon Occasion of some Distress, into which the Treachery of his Enemies had cast him, and out of which the Mercies of God finally deliver'd him; it is very probable that the Rebellion of his Son *Ab-  
lom*

lom against him might be the particular Subject of it.

Throughout it, he expresses his Confidence in the Justice of God upon the Cruelty and Falseness of his Enemies, the Consciousness he had of his own Integrity, and his Reliance thence upon the Goodness of Providence for his Protection and Security.

And in my Text he declares, that from the Sense he had of God's manifold, repeated Favours to him; from the *Multitude of the divine Mercies* towards him; he should be always glad and ready to resort to the House of God, to the Place where God was pleased to manifest his more especial Presence, (which at that Time was the Ark and the Tabernacle it was placed in) there to prostrate himself with all humble Reverence, to visit the *Temple of God*, or the *Palace of his Holiness*, and there to pay him the Tribute of a publick and solemn Worship.

“As for me, I will come into thy House, in, or upon the Multitude of thy Mercy; and in thy Fear will I worship towards thy holy Temple.”

From



From the Words now opened, the following Particulars may deserve our Consideration.

I. The *Reasonableness* of the Resolution here declared by the Psalmist, that he would pay to God the Tribute of Worship.

II. The *Fitness* of the Place he chose for it; *the Palace of his Holiness*, where Numbers resorted for the Purposes of publick Prayer and Thanksgiving.

III. The *Manner* in which he propounded to execute this Resolution; in the *Fear* of God, with an awful Sense of his Wisdom, Goodness, and Power; or (as the Author to the Hebrews hath aptly expressed it) *with Reverence and Godly Fear*.

Heb. xii.  
28.

I. I begin with the *Reasonableness* of the Resolution here declared by the Psalmist, that he would pay to God the the Tribute of Worship.

*His Reason* in this Instance was indeed occasional and particular; and but one of the many Motives which persuade

suade the Discharge of this important Duty.

You'll say, perhaps, that the Thing may well be taken for granted, that the Obligation is generally acknowledged; that the Practice of all Times, all Places, and almost all Persons, proclaims it to be so. Now it is true, that we have, in the Case before us, the Advantage of a very extensive and spreading Practice; Men *do* and *will* naturally fall into the current Usages which they see before them; but then not one in twenty will consider the Reason of them, upon what Grounds and Foundations they *do*, or *ought* to proceed in them; so that when any Accidents cast them upon the Inquiry, they are plunged and bewilder'd; and being themselves at a Loss for a proper Answer to it, they are either ready to think there is none, or else they light perhaps upon a wrong one, which they *who lye in wait to deceive* can easily wrest out of their Hands, and so can force them to surrender at Discretion. Thus Infidelity will be the Result of Credulity. For if you take Things up-

on Trust, negligently and unattentively, you must needs be silent and confounded, when a *Reason is ask'd you of the Hope which is in you.* Consider then well the intrinsic Grounds of that Fitness which it is so generally agreed there is in the Worship of our Maker. Some perhaps will be ready with their Answer, that he hath commanded it, which they conceive sufficient. And I agree it to be so; but then this would be confounding a *moral* Duty with a *positive*, which is lessening the Dignity of the *former*, and ranging it in a lower Class than what is due to it. *Moral* Duties (and such I presume the Worship of God to be) have, besides his Will and Pleasure, Reasons of their own, Reasons of, and to that Will and Pleasure, Reasons everlastingly and inseparably cleaving to the Nature of Things and Persons, in such and such Relations to each other, which enforce and recommend them, and will always do, as they have always done, so.

Now then, how doth the Relation of a reasonable Creature to an all-perfect Creator,



Creator, infinite in Wisdom, Goodness and Power, introduce the Fitness of any Application from the one to the other, in the Offices of religious Worship? Or how should it appear, if God had not commanded it, that he would either expect or accept such a Service from us?

With what View do we lay our Wants before him? Doth he not know them beforehand much better than we do? Shall *we* pretend to apprise infinite Wisdom of any Thing wherewith it would not otherwise be acquainted? No! Our God is a *God of Knowledge*, so exquisite that no Communication from us can increase it, as no Secret of our Hearts can escape it. — Or doth his Goodness want Solicitation to *remind* him, to induce him to be yet more gracious than he is, more attentive to our Occasions, or more inclinable to relieve us in our several Necessities? No: *the Earth* is already *full of his Goodness*, he is *good and gracious to all*, and *his tender Mercies* are so spread over all his Works, that they cannot be more so; nor is his

Goodness receptive of the least Addition to it. Or when we deprecate the Punishment of our Sins, and implore his merciful Pardon, with the Tears and Lamentations of a contrite Sorrow, do we pretend to make our Impressions upon the Tenderness of his Nature, upon the Softness of his Compassions, and so to melt down the Severity and Rigour of his Justice? *Man* indeed is flexible, and may be moved to depart from his Purposes of Justice by the melting Eloquence of Distress and Intreaty. But *God* is utterly impassible, his Purposes are unchangeable, and nothing we can do, will shake, or bend them. 'Twere affrontive to the Excellence of his Nature, and to the Perfection of his consummate Wisdom, to suppose it capable of the least Alteration, the least *Shadow of turning*.

Or when we approach him with the Charity of our Intercessions for his Mercies and Blessings to our Fellow-Creatures; is it that we are better than they? More highly in his Favor; or more mindful of their Interests than he is?

No!

No! He is *the God and Father of all Flesh*; the God of the Jews and of the Gentiles, nor can any Man deliver his Brother, or make an Attonement unto God for him.

Or finally, when we praise him for his Benefits *with joyful Lips*; when, with our holy Psalmist, we go into his House upon the Multitude of his Mercies, and there approach the Palace of his Holiness, with the most expressive Declarations of our Gratitude and Thanksgiving; do we mean by the pleasing Sound of our Eucharistical Oblations to engage his Goodness in the more and farther Largesses of his Favour? To gain thereby upon the Generosity of his Nature, what the like grateful Acknowledgments might probably gain from Men like our selves? No! It may be innocent in Men like our selves, it may be, however, the most pardonable Degree of Vanity and Weakness, to be pleased with the Recital of their own Eulogies and Commendations, with being well spoken and well thought of, with receiving the just Acknowledgments of Persons obliged



to their respective Benefactors. But nothing which hath the least, the remotest Alliance to Weakness and Frailty; nothing which implies one Grain of Addition to the Immensity of his Blessedness and Glory; nothing which can countenance the most distant Supposal, that our *Righteousness and Goodness* do in any Manner *profit or extend to him*, (none I say of these dishonourable Surmizes) must ever be permitted to enter into our Ideas of that awful all-perfect Being, whose glorious *Name* is so far *exalted above all Blessing and Praise*.

These are the most obvious Views, and the most apt to encounter us, in the Payment of any among the aforementioned Offices to our earthy Benefactors: But from the King of *Heaven* they must be carefully removed, as we have seen, they are all derogatory from his infinite Perfections.

Well then! If these are *improper* Regards, what more *proper* Reason will be left for the Support of our Worship, in the several Parts of it which have here been mention'd?

If

If we may not pray (for Example) to God upon any Prospect of acquainting him with our several Wants, or of gaining upon his Goodness to relieve them by the Force and Persuasiveness of our humble Intreaties; what can be the Meaning or the Reason why we are so strongly pressed upon the Duty, why we are commanded to be so *fervent*, to *continue instant in Prayer*, to *pray always*, to *pray without ceasing*? Why! Because Prayer recognizes and settles upon our Minds a Sense of those several Attributes and Perfections in God, the dutiful and cordial Acknowledgement whereof is most likely to maintain and preserve us in the State of Dependence and Subjection we were made for. For can we sin against God, when we are continually imploring his Benefits and Favours? Can we forget that we are Creatures depending upon his Will and Pleasure, when we are ever and anon resorting to him for the Largesses of his Bounty? Can we confess that he *beholdeth the Things which are in Heaven and Earth*, that he *looketh down from Hea-*

*ven upon the Children of Men and consider-  
eth all their Works?* And can we then  
with good Sense or Consistency be re-  
gardless, whether those *Works* shall please  
or affront him? Can we maintain a fre-  
quent habitual Intercourse with a God  
of Holiness and Purity, without some  
Endeavour to resemble him in those a-  
miable Perfections? The plain Tenden-  
cy of these Views is sufficient for the  
Support of any Practice form'd upon  
them; and therefore of the Duty, which  
so evidently implies and promotes them.

In like Manner, when we approach  
him in the humble Strains of peniten-  
tial Sorrow, when we ardently implore  
his gracious Pardon for our several  
Miscarriages, the *Comfort of his Help*,  
with the Guidance and *Etablissement* of  
his *Spirit*; what a Scene of moving and  
melting Considerations must open to our  
Minds with these Views before us?  
What *Indignation*, that we *have* not yet  
approved, what *Fear* that we *may* not,  
what *vehement Desire* that we *may* ap-  
prove our Hearts before him in all ho-  
ly Obedience? The Tendency here is  
obvious,



obvious, and the Reasons of the Duty are notorious.

Again, do we engage in the charitable Office of Intercession for others? The Seeds of mutual Benevolence are foster'd hereby and greatly cultivated. We cannot ask with any Decency the Forgiveness of *their* Sins at the Hands of God, whose Trespases against *our selves* we should not be willing to remit and pardon. We cannot beg any Blessings for them at the Throne of Grace, which we would not confer upon them, (if it were in our Power) out of our own proper Storehouse. Views of *good Will to Men*, as well as of *Glory to God on high*, are hence, you see, consulted.

Finally the Offices of Praise and Thanksgiving add the Motives of *Gratitude* to the Sense of our *Dependence*, and *inspire* us with a more generous and honourable Principle of Obedience. Merely to *expect* is *some* Tie which *all* will feel the Force of; but to be sensible that whatever we *have*, as well as *hope* for, *hath* been, and *must* be, derived from

from the same all-plenteous *Giver of every good and perfect Gift*, doubles the Strength of the former Motive, binds us with the *Cords of a Man*, and interests our Love and our best-natured Affections in the Service of our God.

Thus far we have been employed in considering the Reasonableness of the Resolution declared by the Psalmist in my Text, that he would pay to God the Tribute of *Worship*.

II. Our next Point is, the *Fitness* of the *Place* he chose for it; the *Palace of God's Holiness*, where Numbers resorted for the Purposes of publick Prayer and Thanksgiving. Much was placed to this Account under the *Jewish Economy*. Somewhat, tho' not so much, is founded in the Reason and Nature of Men and Things; accordingly all Ages and Nations have evermore paid some Regard to it. An appropriate *Place* is necessary to the Purposes of public *Worship*. And then common Sense and Decency will remind us, that every such *Place* should be so contrived and modell'd,

dell'd, as may answer in the most apt and effectual Manner, the several Views and Reasons of public *Worship*; that awful Impressions may be made by it upon those who meet there upon such a serious and solemn Occasion; that as they should not, on the one Hand, be made giddy by the Pomp of it, so they should not, on the other, be tempted to Remissness, Indifference, or Neutrality, by the Meanness or Slovenliness of its outward Appearances. Wherefore with all humble Thanksgiving to the great Author and Donor of every *good and perfect Gift*; as with all fit Expressions of Gratitude to the Memory of our pious Benefactors, we may well and justly acknowledge the munificent Provision here made by them for the *Houses of God*, and for the *Offices thereof*, and for the daily Solemnities of his Worship in this beauteous \* *Palace of his Holiness*. I know very well, that Appearances may be too much *laboured*; but I am likewise as sensible, that they may be too much neg-

\* Preached on *Obiit* Sunday at *Windsor*.



*lected.* The *Jews* were tied down to the Letter of *Ordinances* for very wise Reasons; they were a People no otherwise to be kept within the Rule of Duty.

*Christians* in this Point have more Scope, more Liberty and Compass. But yet such Circumstances as are naturally and necessarily appendent to Duties of confessed Importance; such as, if not absolutely *necessary*, are yet *expedient* and proper to the Discharge of those Duties with the best and most ample Effect, fasten an Hold upon them also. I touch upon this but slightly, because it is not the Point, which, under our present Particular, I am most concern'd for. I consider it only as a necessary Circumstance of *Publick Worship*; and as such deriving whatever Value may be due to it, from its Subserviency to its proper *End*. But the *End* itself is of great Importance.

For is the *Worship* of our Maker necessary, upon all, or any of the Views which have now been open'd to you? Why? If *Time* and *Place* were not set apart to it; if in the *midst of the Congregation*

we

we did not praise our God; if we *for-*  
*sook the Assembling of ourselves together* for  
that Purpose; if there were not stated  
and solemn Appointments for it; the  
Fate of *private* Religion might easily be  
foreseen in the Loss of *Public*. Men  
deeply immersed (and so are most Men)  
in the Intrigue of Business, the Hurries  
of Life, the Cares, or the Pleasures of  
this World, would too easily, and too  
generally forget, that there is a God who  
made them, a Providence which pre-  
serves them, and a Judge to whom High  
and Low, Rich and Poor, even Kings,  
and Nobles, Princes and Judges of  
the Earth must all one Day account:  
At least if they did not quite *forget*,  
they would so seldom, so faintly *remem-*  
*ber*, or advert to it; the Influence of  
this Consideration would be so impo-  
tent and feeble, that no Fruit would  
come from it, no Restraint upon Pra-  
ctice, no Regulation of Life and Man-  
ners could be thence expected. But  
now when with unison Lips, and united  
Hearts, we publickly acknowledge our  
Dependence on our Maker; when we  
*enter*

*enter* professedly for that very Purpose *into his Gates with Thanksgiving, and into his Courts with Praise*; when we thus, at known and stated Places and Seasons, assemble together *in the Beauty of Holiness*; we cannot fail of being hence reminded, what Relation we stand in to the great Author of our Beings; we cannot fail of entertaining the Sentiments proper to such a solemn Occasion; some Caution, some Fear, some Jealousy of offending will hence make way to our most leading Affections; in short, our Passions hence will feel some Check, some Rebuke and Curb upon their several Exorbitances.

Now, from what is thus necessary, thus useful and serviceable to the Bulk of Mankind; no particular Person should plead Exemption; even *admitting*, tho' by no Means *granting*, that he could answer these Views for himself upon the Foot of his own personal and private Conduct. Somewhat he owes to the Regards of Example, and to the public Interests of the Community, whereunto he is a Retainer. But as the *brightest*  
Man



Man may yet be *brighter*, and the most *sprightly* yet more *quickned*; nothing but a very faulty Spirit of Pride and Enthusiasm, will hinder any Man from conceiving this may be his Case. Wherefore when such a Spirit is either mortified in him, or prevented, he will doubtless add his Suffrage to the rest, and say with our holy Psalmist; *Let the People* Psal. lxxvii. *praise thee, O God; Yea, let all the People*<sup>3</sup> *praise thee.*

III. Proceed we now to our last Consideration; which was, the Manner in which good *David* propounded to execute his pious Resolution; *viz.* In the *Fear* of God, with an awful Sense of his Wisdom, Goodness, and Power; or, as the Author to the *Hebrews* hath aptly expressed it, *with Reverence and godly Fear.*

This every Attribute of God, when duly improved to us by proper Reflections, may help to enforce and to inculcate. Even the Forgiveness which there is with him, by the Manner and Method wherein we partake of it, was,

with our holy Psalmist, a Motive to the *Fear* of him. His pardoning, redeeming Mercies, tho' fraught, all over, with the most exuberant Demonstrations of his loving Kindness towards us, are yet so guarded against the Insults of Presumption, that the Sinner thence may know, had it not been for a gracious and powerful *Advocate with the Father*, the Righteous themselves could not have stood before him; that they who are not interested in his Mediation, are instructed from the Tenor of that whole Economy, how hopeless and helpless their Condition is; that every Sinner wants a Saviour, and every impenitent Sinner stands excluded from him. Since all Men then are Sinners; all have Reason to approach their Maker, tho' not with a slavish Dread, yet with a religious and awful Reverence; seriously to consider whose Presence they stand in, whose Majesty they are addressing; what Views they are consulting, and what should be the proper Fruit and Consequence of the Business which then employs them: If they regard Iniquity in their Hearts, the  
 Lord

*Lord (they know) will not hear them.* 'Tis equally absurd and presumptuous, in *Words* to acknowledge *Dependence*, and in Practice to avow *Disobedience*. If the Profession of the *Lips* be attended with a Negligence and Obstinacy of *Heart*; if they are not awake upon the Occasion, and intent upon its Importance; if they come and go in mere Form, from a regard to Custom and Fashion only; much more if they behave out of Character, not only in a remiss, but in a ludicrous and trifling Manner; if other Business and other Thoughts, apparently and widely different from the Nature and Purpose of religious Assemblies do manifestly engage them; surely then they must *come together not for the better, but for the worse*; they must *affront* their Maker instead of *serving* him; and the *Sacrifice of Fools* must be too soft a Name for such an ill-managed Worship.

We (my Brethren, God be thanked) have a Plan of *Worship* so wisely directed, so beautifully composed, so aptly contrived for general Use, so well and so fitly suited to the several Ends and Reasons



upon which we pay it; so regular in its *Form*, and so comprehensive in its *Substance*, that tho' I will not undertake to clear it of all Imperfections, or to justify the Expedience of every objected Article; yet, if we will resort to the Use of it in the Spirit of Piety and religious Reverence, I will say, there is in it what will abundantly answer all the Occasions of Prayer and Supplication, of Intercession and Thanksgiving. Some Wants and Cases may be so very *particular*, that no *general* Clauses can extend to them. Here the Application of the *general* must serve the *particular*; *Mind, Body, and Estate* take in every Thing which we can be concern'd for.

Let us then be as honest and observant in the Use of these Means to please him, as God hath been liberal and indulgent to us in the Grant of them; and we need not mistrust the Consequence of *assuring our Hearts before him*. Would we confess our Sins, or acknowledge his Mercies, or deprecate his Judgments, or ask a Supply of our *personal* Wants, or engage in the charitable Office of Inter-  
T
noqu
cession

cession for the Wants of *others*; I have neither seen, nor read, nor heard of any Resort so proper, any Recourse so seasonable and expedient, as to the several Offices of our establish'd Liturgy; where the *Words* are so well *pondered*, and the *Meditations* so well *considered*.

Rightly was it judg'd of great Use and Consequence by the pious Founder of our present Assembly; who accordingly hath dedicated to its Honour a very liberal Proportion of his Substance for the Education of our poorer Youth in its holy Discipline. To a Seminary of these in his Neighbourhood, he had, in his Life-time, long approved himself a prudent Conductor, a forward Promoter, and a generous Benefactor; and that *being dead* he yet might *speak* to them in the Language of that Church to which he was so devoted, he hath bequeathed to them this annual Recommendation of her religious Offices, with fit Persuasives to others for the Support and Encouragement of the like charitable Views. Now the bare Mention of these Views is a sufficient and ample Recommendation!

'Tis almost impossible that they who wish well to the *one*, should fail in their good Wishes to the Interests of the *other*. They who wish well to the Children of the Poor, must wish them train'd up in some good Regimen, and will be hard put to it to find a better. As again, they who wish well to so good a Regimen will be glad of all Hands to strengthen, and of all Hearts to unite in it.

Mean while most reproachful and unseemly will any Behaviour be, which strikes out of the Character so reasonably expected from People bred up under such wholesome Instructions, and professing to *worship the Lord with such an holy Worship*. Their greater Obligations to Obedience will justly be consider'd, as the greater Helps, and consequently as the stronger Ties to it. They must break thro' more forcible Restraints and Checks upon Sin than others, who *have* had the *Lord* so continually *set before* them, who have so often been taught to consider him, as being *about* their *Path*, and *about* their *Bed*, and as *spying out all their Ways*.

I will



I will not forebode such an ugly Consequence upon this auspicious Occasion, tho' a Word of Caution can never be out of Season, that *they who think they stand, should take Heed lest they fall.*

To this End, may God of his infinite Mercy grant, that by a sober and well-weigh'd Use of his Ordinances in the Gospel, and next of the Ordinances in our Church, we may all so grow in his Grace, as here to attain the *full Measure of our Stature in Christ*, and hereafter to praise him in never-dying, never-ceasing *Hallelujahs.*

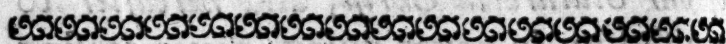
*To whom be Glory and Dominion now  
and ever.*





## SERMON XII.

Preach'd on *Trinity Sunday.*



I JOHN V. 7.

*For there are Three that bear Record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One.*



ONE Point of Fact which was here in View to be proved by our holy Apostle, he hath mentioned to us in the fifth Verse, *viz. That Jesus is the Son of God.* And if my Text be genuine, the Vouchers to the Truth

Truth of that Assertion will stand thus upon the Foot of our present Reading; first, three Witnesses in Heaven attesting it, the *Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost*; and these Three are One, i. e. their *Testimony*, like their *Nature*, is one and the same. Some such Allusion must here, I think, be supposed to rescue the Words from insipid and jejune Tautology. For in *bearing* their *Record* to the same Thing, the mere *Unity* of their *Consent* and *Testimony* is naturally and necessarily imply'd; so that it was plainly needless to insert it afterward, except in the Way which I have hinted of Allusion and Similitude. Now, as this *Son of God* was also the *Son of Man*, (which some in these early Days had denied, and which was therefore another Point in Question) in Proof of his real Humanity, and of his *real Sufferings*, (which they asserted to have been in *Appearance only*) our Apostle *appeals* to three other Witnesses upon *Earth*; the *Spirit, the Water, and the Blood*, all which agreed in one and the same Attestation. These were not one, as *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* are



said to have *been*; but they agreed in one, and bore the same *Record* or *Testimony*. It was no way improper to add the *Testimony* of the Spirit, as a Witness both in *Heaven and Earth*. He had born a signal *Record* to the Truth in Question, when at our Saviour's Baptism his Descent upon him, *like a Dove*, was accompanied with a *Voice from Heaven*, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*. And after our blessed Lord's Ascension, the same holy Spirit, as prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Gospel, stood Voucher *upon Earth*; to the great Truths revealed by it. And thus, I say, it was not improper to name him under a two-fold Capacity. But what, after all, if in this second Class of Witnesses the *Spirit* \* should mean the *Spirit of the Man Christ Jesus*, which upon the Cross he so devoutly commended into the Hands of his Father, and which in Conjunction with the *Water and the Blood*, flowing out of his pierced Side, fully attested the Truth of his

• Mat. iii.  
16, 17.

\* Luke xxiii. 46. *νεῦμα*, as here.

Huma-

Humanity, and of his real Sufferings in our Nature? I know not any Inconvenience in such an Explication. And then we shall avoid the supposed Impropriety of twice introducing the Spirit of God in the Class of the *earthly*, as well as of the *heavenly* Witnesses. Our Apostle's Proof will also be heighten'd by this Construction; and we shall have an *human Soul* for our Saviour, under this View of the *Spirit*, as well as an *human Body* for him to suffer in, under the two other Circumstances of *Water* and *Blood* proceeding from his Wounds.

The *Spirit* here having no Epithet of *holy* annexed to it, as in the former Verse, may be render'd by an Article more general *a Spirit* \* ; which, together with *Water and Blood*, makes up the full Number of *three Witnesses upon Earth*, vouching at once to the Truth and Reality of our Saviour's Suffering, in the Fulness of human Nature.

I offer this as a Conjecture only, be-

\* Τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα in the seventh Verse; in the eighth only τὸ πνεῦμα, without the Epithet of ἅγιον.

cause,

cause, for ought I know, I may stand alone in it; and so I leave it.

But my Text it self, I am sensible, must have somewhat said for it, before we can safely graft upon it any Truth of Consequence. I am aware of the Doubts which learned Men have started upon it, as well the Orthodox, as those of a different Persuasion; and I mean not to be peremptory, where, after my coolest Considerations of the Reasons on both Sides, I can discern no room for any absolute or decisive Certainty.

The total Silence of all the *Greek Fathers*, before and a good while after the *Nicene Council*, is doubtless a Prejudice against it, which must deserve our Notice. Some of them had occasion enough to quote it, had they known of it. The Followers of *Sabellius* (who had confounded all Distinction of Persons in the blessed Trinity, and consider'd them only as different Names of one and the same Person) would have been glad ('tis likely) of the Countenance which this Text might have seemed to give them; since the famous

*Euseb.*



*Eusebius* \* hath inform'd us, that they took Shelter in other Passages of holy Writ a good deal less to their Purpose, tho' it no where appears that they sought hence any Refuge. Finally, the Omission of this Text in the most ancient Greek Manuscripts, particularly in the best and noblest of all now known to the Christian World, which I have myself consulted in the Royal Library, must be acknowledged to carry great Weight with it on the *negative* Side of our present Question.

Yet with all due Allowance to this *negative* Evidence (no Part of which is willingly conceal'd by me) I should think a few *positive* Proofs, which are plain and clear, sufficient in good Sense and Reason to overbear the whole of it. Whether we can, or cannot account for that Omission and Silence, which all, who know any Thing of this Matter, must agree to have been the Case of Fact; yet if it shall appear that any Copies of the New Testament were extant

\* *Euseb. de Eccl. Theolog. B. 3. c. 19.*

in the second and third Centuries which acknowledge my Text and do plainly point to it, such a *positive* Evidence in its Favour must (I should think) be more conclusive for it, than many *negative* Arguments ought to be against it. The Difficulty of procuring exact Transcribers in a Time of Distress and Danger; the casual Slip of their Eye from the *Witnesses* in the seventh to the same Word in the eighth Verse, will tolerably account for the Omission; and will be probable Reasons why many succeeding Copies in after Times should be found alike defective: But what Appearance is there of Argument, what Face of Probability, that a Text so remarkable as this should be inserted, without some authentic Copy to support it? This is therefore not pretended; but the seventh Verse of this Chapter is supposed (I will add without any convincing Reason for it) to be the Comment of those Authors, who are said to have cited it upon the eighth. As thus in the eighth Verse — *There are three who bear Witness, the Spirit, the Water,*  
*and*

*and the Blood ; i. e.* as some early Authors are made to speak, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are here figuratively represented to us ; and *these three are one.* Was ever any Thing so far fetch'd, so uncouth, so unnatural ? And this too charged upon one Writer in particular, who is never found to have indulged such a monstrous Excursion ? He saith expressly (and he liv'd before the Date of our eldest Manuscripts) \* *It is written of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, these Three are One.* Where I beseech you is it *written* throughout the whole sacred Code, if not in my Text ? Or how shall we ever distinguish a *Citation* from a *Comment*, if such Words as these shall not be allow'd for sufficient Notes of Difference between them ? Now this Author liv'd near one hundred Years before the *Nicene* Council, and tho' he wrote in *Latin*, yet I must conclude from the *Premises*, that the *African* Church of which he was a Member, and an eminent Bishop, was then in Possession of some

\* Cyprian. de Unitat. Eccles.



Greek Copies, which acknowledged this disputed Verse.

Above fifty Years before him, when the original Letters of the Apostles were repositd in the Archives of the several Churches founded by them, *Tertullian*\*, I think, did plainly allude to it, *which Three* (saith he) *i. e.* Father, Son and Holy Ghost just before mention'd, *are One; one Thing or Being, not one Person.* Was this now his *own Sense* merely, or was it a *Citation*? Not his *own Sense* surely; for after having named the Words, he distinguishes and *comments* on them: *They are one*, 'tis true (saith he) but how? Not *one Person*, but *one Thing, or Being*! His Adversary would have made *one Person* of them; what then doth our Author say to it? Why, he allows the Words, which he would never (I think) of himself have named; much less have dress'd up his own Sense in them; but he denies the *Construction* of them, in the Manner just now describ'd to you: From whence I

\* *Tertullian* against *Praxeas*, c. 25.

conceive it very evident, that he would not have *com'd*, if he he had not *found* them.

In the fifth Century 'tis manifest beyond all reasonable Contradiction, that the Verse now disputed stood undisputed then among the *African* Churches; since it was inserted by some of their orthodox Bishops in a Confession of Faith exhibited by them to an *Arian* Prince, without any Mark of Diffidence concerning it, or of any Suspicion that it could admit a Debate whether it were or were not genuine.

The great Zeal with which its Authority is now denied, puts it past all doubt with me, that they who oppose it judge it material, that an *Unity of Nature* among the three Persons of the blessed Trinity; is at least alluded to, and taken *pro Confesso*, as an *Unity of Consent* is expressly asserted by it.

But wherever the Scale of *Probability* may be thought to turn, the Balance, after all, appears not to me so clear on either Side, that any Doctrine of Consequence should be left upon this single Bottom;

Bottom; and therefore the Remainder of my Time shall be spent in considering,

I. *First*, What further Light and Evidence may be derived from undoubted Passages of holy Writ, in favour of the Doctrine which my Text alludes to, and indeed supposes as an acknowledged Truth.

II. In the *second* Place, I shall touch upon some Passages of Antiquity, pointing to the same Purpose.

III. I shall examine whether Reason here hath any Cause of Complaint against us.

I. The *Jews* and the *Platonists* from them had fallen upon a Notion (however they came by it) of the *Father, his Word, and Spirit*, whom they interested in all the great Transactions between Heaven and Earth. Three most eminent Distinctions, which natural Reason could never have suggested to them; and therefore I can assign no other Original to their Knowledge and their frequent



quent mention of them, than what must have been merely traditional. The Writers of the New Testament found them in Possession of it, and it will be worth while to observe how they talk'd and behaved upon this great Occasion. We are to consider moreover, that Polytheism and Creature-Worship were the Errors at that Time to be combated; and taking these Views along with us, we are to attend the Process of the Fact, and the Genius of their Language, as oft as this Matter came before them. Concerning which the three following Particulars are very remarkable.

1. That the inspired Pen-Men of Holy Scripture do countenance and confirm the received Notion of the three aforementioned Distinctions.

2. That they speak of them, as we are wont to speak of three different Persons.

3. That they ascribe to each of them the incommunicable Attributes, Honours and Operations of God.

I say, they countenance and confirm the received Notion of the three aforementioned Distinctions.

Thus if the *Jews*, and the *Platonists* from them, had their *Word* or *Wisdom*; whom they interested in the several Works of Creation and Providence; the

Joh. i. 1, 2. Gospel tells us of the *Word made Flesh*; that this Word was *in the Beginning with God, and was God*. If we find among the *former* a frequent Mention of the *Spirit*, or the *Love*; our *Scriptures* are full of the same Acknowledgment, ascribing to the Spirit very many and great Operations and Virtues. The Author to the *Hebrews* expressly styles him the *eternal Spirit*; and various Passages in holy Writ cloath him with <sup>a</sup> *Immensity*, <sup>b</sup> *Omniscience*, <sup>c</sup> *Omnipotence*, and call him moreover in numberless Examples the *Spirit of God*.

He who stands at the Head of these celebrated Distinctions, the great universal Parent, the \* *Father* (as the heathen Poet entitled him) of *Gods and*

Heb. ix.  
14.

<sup>a</sup> Psalm

cxxxix. 7.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. ii.

10.

<sup>c</sup> Job xxvi.

13. and

Psalms

xxxiii. 6.

\* *Ματὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε.* Homer.

*Men,*

*Men*, is himself unquestionably *God blessed for evermore*, and makes, under the Character of *Father*, the first in Order of this glorious Conjunction. So that Revelation doth plainly countenance the Notion, which both the *Jewish* and *Gentile Theology* had got some hint of. We are baptized into the Name of all three alike; and have a manifest Inducement thence to pay them like Worship. And yet we should remember, that Creature-Worship was the very Thing which employed the Labours of *Christ* and his Apostles to discourage and demolish it; that it was one great Design of his Gospel to fix our Dependence upon its true Foundation, and to rescue us from all religious Adoration of them which by *Nature are no Gods*.

But I observe,

2. That the Pen-Men of holy Scripture speak of these three *Distinctions* (whatever be the true Foundation of them) as we are wont to speak of three different Persons.

Concerning the *Father*, there is in this whole Question no Manner of Dis-



pure: And for the *Son*, he will easily be allow'd distinct from the *Father*, who sent him; as the holy *Spirit* will be from both, being their *common Messenger*. The Characters ascribed to each of these in the Gospel, such as *sending and being sent*; a *Teacher coming from God*, and *being called of him*; being an *Advocate with the Father*; a *Comforter, Monitor, Guide and Witness*: These are severally personal Characters, and will bear no Sense without the Supposal of their being so.

If then the *Son* be a *Teacher coming from God*, and our *Advocate with the Father*; and if the Holy Ghost be a *Comforter*, sent to *admonish, to guide*, or to instruct the Church, to *lead it into all necessary Truth*, and to attest the grand Contents of the Gospel; these, I say, if we understand any Thing of them, are Properties which imply a *personal Distinction* between those who severally bear them. Neither is this so apt to be denied us. But then

3. The choaking Difficulty is still behind; *viz.* The ascribing to each of these three *Distinctions* thus personally represented,

presented, the incommunicable Attributes, Honours and Operations of God. Yet this is done by the Gospel Scheme in Terms so plain and so decisive, that a Man must offer great Violence to it, before he can distort such clear and copious Declarations to any other Meaning.

The Author to the *Hebrews* introduces the Father as saying to the Son; *Thy* <sup>Heb. i. 8.</sup> *Throne, O God, is for ever and ever.* And again, *Thou, Lord, in the Beginning hast laid* <sup>Ibid. 10.</sup> *the Foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens are the Work of thy Hands.* And of the Son he farther saith, *Let all the An-* <sup>Ibid. 6.</sup> *gels of God worship him.* Now will any finite Effect be allowed to prove an infinite Cause? If it will not; how come we by our Knowledge of God the Father? If it will; how come we to drop our Acknowledgments of God the Son, the Creator of Heaven and Earth; the Hearer of Prayer, and the Object of the Angels Worship? *St. John* lived to hear the Point in our present Question disputed. And is it fairly conceivable, he should afterwards inform us, that the

*Word which was made Flesh* was really God, except he had intended, we should believe him to be so? Would he not rather have said somewhat to like Purpose with this which follows? “ You have been  
 “ too credulous in your literal Construc-  
 “ tion of those high Characters, which  
 “ have been so zealously ascribed to the  
 “ Man *Christ Jesus*. They were honest,  
 “ indeed, and well-meant Expressions of  
 “ those who used them; but you are  
 “ not to interpret them in their utmost  
 “ Meaning: You should not *equal him*  
 “ *with God*, how highly soever you  
 “ may otherwise advance in your Vene-  
 “ ration towards him.”

This, or somewhat like it, had purely been a proper Caution, and every Way worthy of the Apostolic Character, had the Notion of our blessed Lord's Divinity been an erroneous Persuasion, or had \* *Cerintbus*, who then opposed it, been right in his Contradiction to it. But after the Dispute was started, and the Minds of Men were intent upon the

\* See what *Irenæus* saith of this *Cerintbus*, B. 1. ch. 25.



Subject; to tell us then, that the *Word* so much talk'd of by *Jews* and *Platonists* was *in the Beginning with God, was God,* and then *became Flesh* and *dwelt among us,* and that we *beheld the Glory* of this *Word* incarnate, what (I beseech you) could be the Purport and Tendency of all this Language, but to rivet and fix the Notion, as far as it could be done by the Authority of an inspired Apostle? Now,

If the *Deity* of the second Person be once subscribed to, the *Divinity* of the third will find, it is presumed, the easier Reception; and there was, indeed, less Necessity upon the Pen-men of holy Scripture to labour this Point distinctly, because the Prejudice of the *Jews* was not near so deep nor rooted, against the *Spirit* as against the *Son* of God. If then our Saviour was therefore, among other Reasons, the *Son of God*, because *concei-* Luk. i. 35.  
*ved by the Holy Ghost*; if *lying to the* Acts v. 4.  
*Holy Ghost be lying unto God*; if *he* 1 Cor. ii.  
*searcheth all Things, even the deep Things* 10.  
*of God*; if he be every where, and none Pf. cxxxix.  
*can go from his Presence*; and finally, if  
 he be the *eternal Spirit*, as the Author to

Heb. ix.  
14.

the *Hebrews* hath been observed to style him; these are such Notes and Characters, such Properties and Attributes of God, as cannot without Blasphemy be ascribed to any one besides him. And it is infinitely, I say, improbable that the Scriptures should ascribe to any besides the *One true God*, the Attributes and Honours incommunicably due to him. It was (I have said) the avow'd Design of the Christian Revelation, to cure the erroneous Opinions, and corrupt Practices, which had every where obtain'd concerning God and his Worship; and most particularly that universal Corruption of Polytheism and Creature-worship, which yet, instead of being redressed and rectified, is strengthened and established by the Gospel, if the Son and Holy Ghost be not truly Partakers of the Divine Nature.

Thus far we may safely go, and may take Scripture along with us for our Guide and Leader: But all farther Attempts have ever hitherto prov'd unfortunate. When we pretend to *explain* the *Manner* of what is at last *inexplicable*, we ramble in a Wilderness which we are sure

to

to be lost in. This was the Fate of *Sabellius*, and his unwarrantable Refinements; as, amidst the Heat of an unguarded Opposition to his over-curious Speculations, *Arius* plunged afterwards into a Gulph which sunk him. The Error of *Sabellius* being eldest in Point of Time, led some of the Ancients into Expressions which favour'd of the opposite Extreme; and seem'd favourable to the Notions espoused afterwards by *Arius*.

All this Mischief proceeded from their quitting the Rule of God's Oracles and indulging the Subtilties of human Fancy. Yet,

II. *Secondly*, We have many laudable Passages in divers of them, attesting the Soundness of their Doctrine and Practice. Give me leave to touch with all convenient Brevity upon a few of them.

*Irenæus* \* well observed, that neither our Saviour himself nor the Holy Spirit, nor the Apostles of Christ would ever have given the Title of Lord in such a peremptory Manner as they severally did, to our Lord

\* Book 3. chap. 6.

Christ,



*Christ, if he had not been properly and truly so; even as truly so as the Father himself.*

*Tertullian's* whole Book against *Praxeas*, was written against a Man, who so believed the Divinity of the *Son*, that he even confounded him with the *Father*, and made of both but one *single Person*; which was the Error afterwards espoused by *Sabellius*. It was thought that the Scriptures spoke so full to the *Deity* of the second Person, as to leave no room for the first, nor for any other; but that all three were only different Names of one and the same Person. This was the Point which *Tertullian* opposed; who yet, whilst he guarded professedly against the *Confusion of the Persons*, as strenuously maintain'd the *Unity* of their *Substance*. *Novatian* \* argued for our blessed Lord's Divinity from the confessed Circumstance of his *hearing the Prayers of those who every where invoked him*.

*Clemens Alexandrinus* † hath a most remarkable Invocation of all the three Persons in the *Blessed Trinity*. *Be propitious*

\* Nov. de Trinit. c. 14.

† In Pædag. Book 3. chap. the last towards the End.

(saith

(saith he) to thy Disciples, O Christ, our heavenly Master; O Lord, the Father and the Son, who are both One, grant us the Opportunity to praise thee, the only Father, and the only Son, with the Holy Ghost who are all in one.

Athenagoras † thus apologizeth for his Brethren Christians, who were charged by the Heathens of that Age with Atheism.

Who (saith he) would not wonder to hear those Men charged with Atheism, who profess to believe in God the Father, God the Son, and Holy Ghost; acknowledging their Power in Unity, and their Distinction in Rank and Order? The same Author hath in like Manner represented it as one great Object of the Christian's Hope from another Life; To be made acquainted with the Ties, which unite the Son to the Father; and with the Communications which the Father hath made of himself to the Son; who, and what is the Holy Ghost; what this ineffable Union, and what the Disjunction, where there was such an Union, be-

† In legat. pro Christianis.

*tween Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

Thus far Holy Scripture and Antiquity seem well accorded. The several Authors who have here been cited by me, liv'd all before the Council of Nice, and so could not be influenced by any Decisions from it.

Here, I confess, I could gladly make a Stop, and would willingly proceed no farther; since for myself I could easily acquiesce in the foregoing Particulars, which I think the Holy Scriptures are very clear in: As speaking fully to *three eminent Distinctions*; representing them *severally*, as we are wont to represent three different Persons; and ascribing to each of them the *incommunicable Attributes, Honours, and Operations of God*. The farther we go after this, the worse, I doubt, it will fare with us; as the Church of *Christ* hath suffered in this Matter from nothing more severely than from petulant Objections, veil'd under a Shew of *Reason*, which have drawn on peremptory and opposite Decisions; as those again have produced Rejoinders, Replications, Altercations, and farther Objections without End or Measure. But  
let



let those who began the Pray with their unauthoris'd Assertions, bear, as they should in Justice, the Blame of what followed afterwards. The Church was content 'till the Days of *Arian*, to maintain herself in quiet Possession of the Doctrines once deliver'd to her, without farther or more explicit Deductions from them. He interposed with an *explicit Opposition* to them; which produced on her Part an *explicit Defence* of them; and the Field of Battle hath ever since been wide enough for Numbers of all Sorts to engage in. But let us proceed to examine,

III. *Thirdly*, Whether Reason here hath any Cause of Complaint against us.

That the blessed Deity should exist after a Manner which we neither do, nor can comprehend, will never surely be the Ground of Astonishment, or of just Objection; that there should be Modes of Subsistence and Distinctions in it, to which we are utter Strangers, cannot be shocking to our Reason, if sound and humble. We, who ourselves exist  
so

so fearfully and wonderfully; who know not whereof we are made, nor how we think, and *live, and move, and have our Being*; who understand not the Substance of our own Minds or Bodies, or, indeed, of any thing about us; how an Act of the one should operate upon the other, or command our Limbs into Motion and Activity; I say, with all this thick Darkness surrounding us, this gross Ignorance of Things we are most familiar with, We surely should never dispute the Oracles of Truth, because they represent an infinite Being with *Clouds and Darkness* as round about him.

The grand Objection from Reason turns in this Case, upon the proper Ground of those Distinctions which we call *personal*; and we call them so, merely because the Scriptures speak of them, as we are wont to speak of different Persons; and therefore seem to prefer that Sense and Meaning before any other. Yet we confess it a borrow'd Phrase, a figurative or analogous Expression, which will not in all Points endure a rigorous or exact Construction. Indeed, where

we have no just and compleat Idea, we can have no full nor adequate Term whereby to represent it. If *Words* are the *Pictures* of *Thought*, the *Copy* must share in the Defects of its *Original*; so that whatever other *Word* had been chosen for expressing these *Distinctions* in the Blessed Deity, might have been as liable as this to Cavil, when worried by a nice and exceptionous Scrutiny.

But at last strict Consequences should not be charged upon Metaphors and Figures, and unaccurate Modes of speaking, which, 'tis confessed, in the Case before us must always be *unaccurate*. The Knowledge of what it is which disjoins, and of what *unites* the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*, the precise Ground of their *Conjunction* and *Distinction*, we must be content (with the judicious Author above cited) to reserve for the Privilege and Entertainment of our future State; in our *present* we know not with Certainty the Principle which constitutes any one Individual, or which makes amongst human Beings a diversity of Persons. How much more Reason is there  
to



to expect that in the Things of God and in the Manner of his Existence, *this Knowledge should be too wonderful and excellent for us*; that we with our most curious Researches should *not attain unto it?*

Meanwhile Humility and Modesty in those who dissent from us upon the present Article; some Diffidence of themselves, and of the Reach and Compass of their own Understandings; some Check upon the licentious Excursions of human Fancy; some Degree of Deference to the Apprehensions of others, to public Decisions and to the Judgment of the World about them; some Acknowledgment, if they trust to themselves that they are *Christ's*, that others may be so as well as they; above all, a Readiness of Mind to receive Conviction, a serious and fixed Regard to the Oracles of Truth, with a Submission to them of each favourite Conceit, and of every darling Notion; these are severally the Dispositions and Circumstances, which will best prepare them for *casting down Imaginations, and every high Thing which exalteth*

*alteth itself against the Knowledge of God,  
and for bringing into Captivity every Thought  
to the Obedience of Christ.*

*To God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
be ascribed, as most due, by us, and by  
all the World, Glory and Majesty, Do-  
minion and Power, from henceforth  
for ever.*

*Now the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the Love of God, and the Com-  
munion of the Holy Ghost be with you  
all. Amen.*





# SERMON XIII.

Preached on *New-Year's-Day*.



PHILIP. ii. 5, 6, 7, and Part of  
the 8<sup>th</sup> Verse.

*Let this Mind be in you, which was  
also in Christ Jesus:*

*Who being in the Form of God,  
thought it not Robbery to be equal  
with God:*

*But made himself of no Reputation,  
and took upon him the Form of a  
Servant,*



*Servant, and was made in the Likeness of Men.*

*And being found in Fashion as a Man, he humbled himself —*

**T**HE Case of suffering for the Gospel of *Christ*, was so often the Lot of his earliest Converts, that it could not but be a frequent Subject with his Apostles in their respective Addresses to their several People. Thus in the 29<sup>th</sup> Verse of the preceding Chapter, *St. Paul* reminds these *Philippians*, that to them it was given in the *Behalf of Christ*, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his Sake. Thence he exhorts them to be like-minded, lowly and benevolent towards each other. And in my Text he propounds (to them, as of all other the most engaging and the most likely to gain upon them, the Example of *Christ Jesus*; who being in the Form of God, i. e. “ having often heretofore appeared, and “ having it even then in his Power to “ have done so, with all the Pomp and “ Splendor of his Father’s Court, yet

“ thought it not proper at that Time to  
 “ display all the Ensigns of his Majesty  
 “ and Glory, did not assume to himself  
 “ the Honours of his Divinity; but  
 “ was content to veil the Brightness of  
 “ his Person, under mean Appearances,  
 “ to *make himself of no Reputation, to take*  
 “ *upon him the Form of a Servant, to be*  
 “ *made in the Likeness of common Men,*  
 “ to be found, after this Manner, in  
 “ Fashion and all outward Show, as  
 “ another Man, and by these several  
 “ Means to *humble himself, &c.*” Thus  
 I venture to interpret my Text, some-  
 what differently, I am aware, from the  
 received Construction.

But I observe, that our Apostle's De-  
 sign was here to represent the chosen  
 Humiliation of *Christ*; and in order to  
 it, he consider'd him first as invested  
 with divine Power, and thence in a Ca-  
 pacity for shewing himself, if he had a  
 Mind to it, with all outward Appea-  
 rances of Splendor and Glory; these he  
 assumed not, *but* was content to veil  
 them. Whereas the Word *but*, would  
 lose all its Sense and Energy, if it  
 were

were not set in Opposition to the Passage next before it. And indeed the Force of the Antithesis is entirely lost and sunk in the usual Way of Interpretation. For to say (as our Version doth) that he *thought it no Robbery, no Injustice, to equal himself, or to be equal with God, but made himself of no Reputation*; are indeed Assertions so opposite, that they are perfectly contradictory: But then they do by no Means carry the Spirit of a just Antithesis; both Parts of which ought always to illustrate and heighten each other. Whereas when I make the Apostle say of our Saviour, what his Words will well bear, and the Sense does require, that “ he  
 “ did not put in his Claim to the Divi-  
 “ nity, tho’ so aptly entitled to it; did  
 “ not assume an Equality with God, tho’  
 “ by being in *the Form of God*, he might,  
 “ if he had pleas’d, have made another  
 “ Guise and Appearance than he really  
 “ did; *but that instead of this, he made*  
 “ *himself of no Reputation, and took upon him*  
 “ *the Form of a Servant, and was made in*  
 “ *the Likeness of Men, and being found in*  
 “ *Fashion*



*“Fashion as a Man, humbled himself, &c.”*

I say, when I make our Apostle speak thus of our Saviour, I think the Passage much clearer, and the two Parts of the Antithesis do not contradict nor confound, but illustrate and set off each other. “He did not assume what he might have done, did not put in his Claim to the Divinity he was vested in, but rather chose to humble himself.” Now if the Apostle had really represented him *thinking it no Robbery to be equal with God*, this indeed might have been true, tho’ surely no Proof of that Humiliation which it was here our Apostle’s Purpose to insist on.

I affect not to strike out of the beaten Road; yet where I see Truth so plainly out of it, I cannot, I ought not, to resist her Calls.

The Text thus open’d, leads us to consider our Saviour’s Humiliation, (the Humiliation I mean of his *Life*, for I pursue it no farther) in the several Parts of it. Each of these will furnish us with suitable Lessons for our own Practice and Imitation.

To

To represent this Matter justly, we find our Apostle setting it in two different Lights; and therefore our fittest Method will be to view it with him, in each of them.

I. *First* he observes, that our Saviour was *in the Form of God*. From which high Estate of Honour, Dignity and Power, instead of displaying it with Advantage in its native Colours, he proceeds to observe,

II. *Secondly*, That our Saviour chose a Veil and Cover to it; he *humbled himself*, &c.

I. I begin with considering our Saviour, as *being in the Form of God*.

Now tho' I cannot in every Thing subscribe to our common Construction, nor be absolutely certain, that the *Form of God* means here the very *Essence* of God and only *that*; yet I verily think the *Socinian* Interpretation as wide of the Mark, and every whit as short of our Apostle's Meaning. They would have the *Form of God* to mean no more than

the *Power of God*, conspicuous (as they say) in our Saviour's Miracles. The Thing in Part is true; but the Application of it here is absurd and improper. For our Saviour did not veil this *Form of God*, did not hide this Power of Miracles, which was design'd for gaining Credit to his Mission and Authority; of this in Fact he did not empty himself, did not lay aside so much as the Appearance of it. For we ever and anon find him making his Appeal to his mighty Works, and demanding *Belief* for the Sake of them: *Believe me* (saith he) *for the very Works sake*. The *Form of God*, which is here ascribed to him, must have been somewhat which he was content to depart from, or at least to cover when *he was made in the Likeness of Men*. The Antithesis of the Text hath a double Aspect upon the State he came from, and the State he came to. The one the *Form of God*, the other the *Fashion of a Man*, nay, even the *Form of a Servant*. They therefore who would represent the *Form of God*, as relative only to certain Powers and Privileges wherein

our

John xiv.  
11.



our Saviour was vested during his Abode upon *Earth*, forget that it stands opposed to his very Appearance there, and is set off as with a Foil, from his being *made in the Likeness of Men*. His Incarnation it self was indeed a most humbling Circumstance. For the Author to the *Hebrews* hath represented him to us as *the Brightness of the Father's Glory*, Heb. i. 2, 3, 11. and *the express Image of his Person*, by whom he made the Worlds; laid the Foundation of the Earth, and the Heavens were the Works of his Hands. As St. John had before declared of him, that *he was in* Joh. i. 2, 3. the Beginning with God, and that *all Things were made by him*. And in the same holy Evangelist we read our blessed Lord himself alluding to *that Glory* Joh. xvii. 5. which he had with his Father before the World was. Under this Quality and Character he govern'd the Church of God from the Beginning of the World; as such appearing occasionally to the Patriarchs and Prophets, and exhibiting that amazing *Shechinah*, that visible Glory, as a standing Mark of the divine Presence in *Solomon's Temple*. Of this  
it

Exod.  
xxxiii. 15

it was which *Moses* said to God, *If thy Presence go not with me, carry us not up hence; where the LXX read it, If thou thy self do not go with me.* And this was the most undisputed Doctrine of the Primitive Church, that the *Angel of God's Presence, the Angel, the Redeemer, or an uncreated Angel in whom was Jehovah,* as the Rabbins severally speak of him, was that very Person, who afterwards appeared in *Fashion as a Man.* This was that *Breath of the Power of God, that pure Influence flowing from the Glory of the Almighty; that Brightness of the everlasting Light, that unspotted Mirrour of the Power of God, and the Image of his Goodness,* whereof we have mention in the Book of *Wisdom*; and finally 'twas he to whom the Creator is said to have given a *Commandment,* that his *Dwelling should be in Jacob, and his Inheritance in Israel;* he whom the Lord possessed in the *Beginning of his Ways,* and under whose Ministry the grand Transactions between God and his Church were all along directed; this was the Person said by our Apostle to have been in the  
*Form*

Wisd. vii.  
25, 26.

Ecclus.  
xxiv. 8.

Prov. viii.  
22.

*Form of God*; or, as we find him else-<sup>Coloff. i.</sup>  
 where styled, the *Image of the invisible*<sup>15, 16, 17,</sup>  
*God, the First-Born of every Creature*;  
 by whom all *Things* were created, which  
 are in *Heaven*, and which are in *Earth*,  
*visible and invisible*, whether they be  
*Thrones, or Dominions, or Principalities,*  
*or Powers*, (they were all created) by  
 him, and for him; and he is before all  
*Things*, and by him all *Things* consist.  
 And he is the *Head of the Body the*  
*Church*. In these august Characters of  
 Majesty and Royal Power do the Scrip-  
 tures describe *Christ* our Mediator, as  
 well before, as after his *tabernacling in*  
*our Flesh*. And I cannot but rather think  
 with the few, who interpret the *Form of*  
*God* in my Text, as allusive to his high  
 and important Office, and to the Digni-  
 ty thereof; than with the many, who  
 would make it significant only of his  
*internal Essence*, and of his metaphysical  
 Nature or Substance. For the Antithe-  
 sis, I have observed, turns altogether  
 upon the Difference between the State  
 he came *from*, and that he came *to*. And  
 as to the Divinity of his Nature, the  
*Form*



*Form of God*, doth rather suppose and imply it, than directly assert or lay a Stress upon it. We are here to follow our Apostle in his present View, as describing the Creator, the Head of all Things, him who *was in the Beginning with God, and was God, the Word and Wisdom* of the Father; I say, we are to follow our Apostle describing this excellent exalted Person, in his Descent from the *Habitation of his Holiness and Glory* to take upon him our Nature, and to redeem that Church over which he had so long presided.

And this is the opposite Side of View, wherein we are henceforwards to consider him.

Hitherto we have survey'd him, cloath'd with all the Ensigns and Habilliments of Majesty and Power, transacting all the great Concerns between Heaven and Earth, in Virtue of his mediatorial Kingdom, without any Diminutions or Abatements of his Royal Dignity. But now

II. We must shift the Scene, and set him

him in another Light; this *Form* of God which he had so long worn, this *Brightness of the Father's Glory*, which had hitherto encircled him, was obscured and eclipsed, upon his Appearance in the *Fashion of a Man* and in the *Form of a Servant*.

For the Text tells us, that when he thus appeared, *he coveted not, he caught at no Opportunity* (so the Words \* signify which we translate, *thought it no Robbery*) to be, or to be thought, *equal with God*; but was content to veil his essential Glory, and to appear in all Points as an ordinary Messenger from God, attended with no outward Circumstances of *Form* or *Figure*, to engage Admiration, or to force Respect. Thus *he humbled himself* — Now

Here our View will be taken at most Advantage, if we consider,

\* *ὅτι ἀρπαλά, ἰδὲ ἐκαστὸν ἡμεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ, φαίη Ἀρσὰς τοῦ Θεαγένους (in Heliodor.) He doth not look upon this as a great Effect! (viz. when she would have solicited him to her Embraces) nor a Thing to be coveted, or caught at. And when the Death of her Rival was propounded to her, as what might probably gain her Point, 'tis said of Arsace, ἀρπαλά τοῦ πολεμίου ἐκαστὸν ἡμεῖς Ἀγρίων. She embraced the Motion, she catch'd at it as a Thing extremely desirable.*

1. Our

1. Our Saviour's Humiliation somewhat more particularly under its several Branches. And when we have gone thro' these it may then be fit in the

2. *Second* Place, to touch a little upon the Reasons of it; which will open me in the

3. *Third* Place, an easy Passage to those Lessons of Practice, which are hence recommended to us.

1. *First* then, we are to consider our Saviour's Humiliation somewhat more particularly under its several Branches.

In which his Birth, as first in Point of Time, so was not least remarkable, for its lowly Circumstances. As in the Course of his future and public Life, he wanted those ordinary Accommodations of which even the Foxes and Birds of the Air are seldom destitute; so here, in his Entrance upon this Vale of Mi-fery, our Infant Saviour found no Reception, but amongst the Beasts; whom yet he always found more tame and tractable, than those *Beasts of the People*, who thirsted afterwards for his Blood. They lent him their *Manger* for a *Cradle*,  
and



and their *Straw* for his own and his Mother's Bed. He had created the World, with every fine gay Thing which is most attractive in it; and by a Miracle of his Power could have forced into his Service the whole Posse of Nature, with her richest Treasures. His the *Earth was, and the Fullness thereof*; and he might have commanded, I say, the Obedience of the Whole, or any Part of it, to have ministered to his Pleasure. Had his Thoughts been like Man's upon this Occasion, he would not have chosen such a Time and Place for entring upon his new untried Habitation, wherein he might be sure of missing the most common Conveniencies, and of exposing his person to the most ignominious Hardships; he would rather have consulted Appearances and Pomp of Life, would have chosen delicate Attire for his Cloathing, and a King's Palace for his Mansion. He, who had commanded Legions of Angels, would at least have had his Guards and Ministers to attend him, to give solemn Notice to  
the

the great ones of the Earth, that they should veil their Grandeur, and pay their Compliments of Reverence and Homage to their new-born King. Had his Thoughts, I say, run in the ordinary Channel of *human* Fancy, this, in all likelihood, had been the Result of them. But a few humble Shepherds were, in Fact, the Persons, to whom the great Secret of a new-born Saviour first was notified; Men little busied in the dark Intrigue and Policy of Life, were thought the fittest to be entrusted with the grand Design of the World's Redemption. To these were only added a few wise Men of Retirement and Speculation, ready Followers of Truth, and zealous in the Quest of Knowledge, who were Witnesses with the Shepherds of his lowly Birth, and through the *Fashion of the Man* discerned and adored the Majesty of God. Hence if we proceed,

*Secondly*, To consider him in the Course of his Youth, and Education; here were no Advantages laid in to prepare him for the Figure he was afterwards to sustain, or to raise in the World the least Expectation,

Station, that it was he who should redeem it; and therefore when, in the Course of his Ministry, he came into his own Countrey, and taught in their Synagogues, the People were astonished, as knowing that he had not been bred to it; and accordingly asked, *Whence hath this Man this Wisdom; is not this the Carpenter's Son?* The Carpenter, they were sure, could not so instruct him, who probably had brought him up to no higher nor better Calling than his own. He had no sooner breath'd his first Air amongst us, than *Herod*, jealous of a King, whose *Kingdom was not of this World*, would have prevented the Designs of Heaven, and made his Soul an Offering, before the Time was ripe for it. Hence, without any fit Provisions for such a tedious Journey, his helpless Parents were forced to look out a Shelter for him in a foreign Countrey. Neither the Privacy of his Life, nor the Lowliness of his Fortune proved to him Securities from those Storms and Tempests, which only in other Cases affect the great ones of the Earth. Even Poverty

Mat. xiii.  
54, 55, 56.  
57.



itself, tho' it exposed him to Contempt, did not, however, rescue him from Danger. We have little more upon Record of what passed in his retired Life, except his Encounter with the Doctors in the Temple, which engaged him in a Part exceeding the common Measure of *human* Powers, tho' not perfectly nor clearly exhibiting the *Divine*. And tho' all was extraordinary, and drew the Admiration of Observers with it, *at his Understanding and Answers*; yet he had the Rebuke of his Parents to mortify him for doing the Business of a Father, whose peculiar Relation to him enter'd not then into their Hearts to conceive or guess at. Thenceforwards the sacred Story takes no other Notice of him, than that he went home with his Parents, and *was subject to them* in the common Course of Life and of Employment to which they assigned him. But,

Luke ii.  
41, &c.

*Thirdly*, Upon his Attainment of the Age, allowed by the Law and Usage of his Country, for entering upon the Administration of sacred Offices (under which

Numb. iv.  
3.

which particular his Regard to Decency and establish'd Order deserves our Notice) a Scene thence opened to him, the most mortifying of any we can conceive to an innocent ingenuous Temper. The *Form* of God, wherein he had before appeared as Governor of his Church, was already indeed obscured and clouded; but there remained enough of its *Power*, in the *Man Christ Jesus*, to have convinced the Willing and Obedient, that he was their long expected Saviour and Deliverer. Yet how few, in the Comparison, were they who received and embraced the Offers of Salvation propounded by him? If, as a Man, encompassed with all innocent and holy Affections, he had at Heart any one Endeavour or Point in Life; surely it must have been the Progress of his Gospel, and the favourable Reception of his Ministry. Personal Outrages, with all the Hardships of Want and Labour, he easily knew how to bear with and forgive; but Affronts upon his Mission, and upon the Spirit whereby he acted, drew from him the hardest Censure,

which was ever known to proceed from his gracious Mouth. These (he told the *Pharisees*) were *Sins irremissible*; *Blasphemies* which were never *to be forgiven*! The Design which brought him into the World spoke so much Love to us, that the Perverseness of those who received him not, must needs have affected him with a proportionable Weight of Sorrow. He came to seek and to save them; but they (for their Parts) would have none of his Counsel. They knew not how to take it from a Man of his small Appearances. They wanted to be told from a *Throne* how they should live in a *Cottage*; to have the *Light* which should convince them *dazzle* them; and the *Form* of their Teacher shew forth his *Power* to them. But as the *Man Christ Jesus* was sent into the World *not to be minister'd unto, but to minister*, to perform for others all courteous, useful, and lowly Offices, and to live amongst his Disciples themselves, more like a Servant than a Master; this to *carnal* Minds, which knew no Good but what was of the same Nature, was a grievous *Scandal*; a mighty



mighty Obstacle to their Belief of a Doctrine, so ill, in their Opinions, recommended. And all the Miracles wrought in proof of it could never overcome this fatal Prejudice. Thus he went on, *despised and rejected of Men*, till their *Contempt* was turn'd at length into *Rage and Malice*, the Effects of which our present Solemnity forbids me to rehearse upon this Occasion.

They ought to have considered, what the Course of my Argument leads me next, and,

2. *Secondly*, To touch upon, *viz.* The Reasons which moved him thus to *humble himself*; now these were the Attainment of our Sins; and the *leaving us an Example*. For,

*First*, None better understood the Doctrine of Sacrifices and of the Expiations made by them, than the People who had so great a Share of their Religion and their Worship thereupon depending. Now every Part of our Saviour's Life, so far as it was sorrowful and shameful to a Person utterly innocent and undeserving of all Punishment, must be placed

to the Account of our Sins, for which *his Soul* (or his Life) was finally *made an Offering*. Even his Entrance into the *Virgin's Womb*, *when he took upon him to deliver Man*; his condescensive Incarnation, his lowly Birth, with all the humbling Circumstances of his painful Life, had each of them their proper Tendency, to compensate for our Blemishes, and to fill up the Gaps and Defects of our Obedience. But as another Season commemorates more particularly the finishing this great Design, and the perfecting this All-sufficient Sacrifice, I content myself at present with only referring to it. Wherefore,

*Secondly*, The *leaving us an Example*, is the next Account to be given of our Saviour's Humiliation. This, if there had been no other deficient Circumstance, would have blasted all the Fruit and Success of Heathen Morality. *Living* Instances are far more persuasive, than the finest Embellishments of *unpractised* Discourse. Among the Philosophers of the *Gentile* World, they, who could not come at the Riches or Honours

nours of Life, would easily be thought to despise, or undervalue them, for no better Reason than either from their Ignorance of them, or from their Want of Power to enjoy them. They whose Access was more open to them, commonly took their Fill of them, and so were in no Condition of recommending *Poverty* in the Midst of *Plenty*, or of pressing Abstinence upon others, who, for themselves *fared sumptuously every Day*. This had been ridiculous and quite out of Character. But now when he, who was in the *Form of God*, and thereby could have commanded all the Pomp and Pleasure of Life to attend his Motions, was content to divest himself of this glorious *Form*, to want even the most ordinary and common Conveniencies, and to exhibit the strongest Specimen of active and passive Virtues; here were *Precept* and *Practice both* wrought up to their highest Perfection; each in its Turn lent Assistance to the other; *this* recommended, and *that* exemplified. If the *Precept* itself were lovely and engaging, the *Practice* represented it infinitely more so: Or if the *Precept* were difficult and shock-



ing to human Nature; yet the *Practice* proved, that human Nature was not incapable, where there should be a willing Mind. If any Man's Birth, or Station, or Figure, or Fortune, would seem to exempt him from the more unpleasing Duties of Life; the Submission of our Saviour to them hath prevented all Remonstrance, hath foreclosed all Objection, and stifled the Complaints of each gain-saying Lust. For

3. (To enter now upon my *third* and last Particular) those Lessons of Duty which our Saviour's Example hath recommended to us, carry a Force with them which no Heart but a stony one will be able to resist; and they are more particularly these which follow.

*First*, The most condescensive *Humility*, which the Text indeed hath more particularly specified. Tho' conscious always of the Glory which he had with God before the Foundation of the World; of the Part he bore in its Creation and Government, and of what yet remain'd to him before the End of it; yet how sparing was he in any mention of his high

high Prerogatives? The *Son of Man* was the Title he most affected; of *Man* who scorn'd and vilified him, and yet could never provoke him to hate, or to abandon the bold Despiser. Affronts and Injuries are apt to turn our Thoughts inwards, to fix our Reflections upon any Advantages of Mind, or Birth, or Fortune, which we may happen to be possessed of; these we consider as Aggravations of the supposed Outrage, and thence we rate and size the Magnitude of the Offence against us. Our Saviour was so far from making any such Ostentation of his Merit or his Dignity, that they who would not take the Measure of them from his *Actions* were never tempted to take it from his *Words*. Indeed the Spirit which spake in his Apostles, did Justice afterwards to his Character and Person; but we never find him speaking of himself in any Strain of exalted Language. He always declined *bearing such a Record*; and besides the Indecency of the Thing, he knew it would be to little Purpose with such as would not believe his *Works*. Nor did the

the Sense of his high Dignity and Station restrain him ever from the most lowly Offices; not even from that of washing his Disciples Feet. He was determined to live among them, as *one who served*; a Carriage very different from that of their supercilious Doctors, who exacted of their Scholars the very highest Degrees of Observance and Respect! But he look'd for a much higher Exaltation, than the highest this World could give him; and therefore lower Regards were beneath his Notice or his Care. Accordingly I observe in the

*Second Place*, that his Self-Denial was equal to his Humility and Condescension. A signal Specimen of which he exhibited in his early Submission to the Discipline of that painful Ceremony which we this Day commemorate. And his whole Life proceeded thro' like Examples of a mortified laborious Virtue. The Kingdoms of the World and the Glory of them were all in his Power; by *a Word of which* he upheld them: So that he might have done what he pleased in Heaven and Earth. He had all the  
innocent



innocent Affections of human Nature craving from him; yet not one of them gain'd a single Concession from him in his Life, which might not have become a Man of the severest Morals, even at the Hour of his *Death*. So strict and so subdued were all of them, so accustomed to Rebuke and Disappointment, that they never expected the least improper Indulgence. Holding them always at Command, and in a State of absolute Subjection, he might have let them out with all Safety to some farther Lengths than he ever allowed them; but that he was to furnish frail Creatures with a Pattern of *perfect* Holiness, which should not only be without *Blemish*, but without the *Suspicion* of it; not only keep clear of *Evil*, but even of its *Appearance*. Hence instead of any Thing which look'd like exceeding *in Provision for the Flesh*, even the Necessaries of Life were often wanting to him. Instead of carking for Years beforehand, he took no Thought for so much as the *Morrow*. And doubtless there is a certain Measure wherein his *Example* either  
*claims*

*claims our Imitation, or upbraids our Practice.* If we cannot or need not come up to the Degree of his utter Indifference for the Conveniences of Life; yet surely the Anxiety, the *Vehemence* of our Pursuits might hence be abated; and our Sense of Disappointments be less raging and tempestuous. If we cannot be quite dead, as he was, to the World and its Enjoyments; yet certainly we might be less attach'd to it, and our Passions might be less fervent in their Quest of its Enjoyments, or in their Indulgence to them.

*Thirdly* and lastly, the Benevolence of our Saviour towards Mankind, is the distinguish'd Circumstance which most claims our Notice in his whole Undertaking. For this was indeed the decisive Inducement which put him upon the Exercise of his other Virtues. There had been no need of his Patience, Self-Denial, nor indeed of any single Part in his whole Humiliation, if his Love of Souls and his Regard to our Salvation had not moved him to enter upon a State of Life which call'd for them.

As

As he was in the *Form of God*, there was no Room nor Place for them: But the *Fashion of a Man*, and the *Form of a Servant* required *all* of them. Here therefore let it be observed with Shame to us, that those several Offices of Love and Condescension which one Piece of Clay is too proud and lofty to perform for another, were discharged for *both* of them, by the *Image of the Invisible God*, and the *Brightness of the Father's Glory*: That what the Sons of Men, tho' they have common Interests and common Wants, are too little concern'd to do for each other; the Son of God, when he had no Alliance to us, was moved to undertake, to enter for that Purpose into an Alliance with us, and at last to finish his mighty Enterprize with an Expence which none could pay but he in whom *all Fullness* dwelt.

*Wherefore to the mighty God, the everlasting Saviour, the Prince of Peace be ascribed, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, all Honour, Adoration and Thanksgiving, now and ever.*

SERMON





## SERMON XIV.

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ACTS x. 38.

— *Who went about doing Good.*



THE Words are St. *Peter's*, as the Character is our *Saviour's*, who spake as never Man spake, and did as never Man did. His miraculous Powers which were intended for Evidences of the Commission whereby he acted, will naturally attract our *Admiration*, and our *Esteem* of the Person whom God did so highly favour. But

his Benevolence to Mankind, exemplified in all the Instances and Offices of Love, which the *Ignorant* could receive from the *Knowing*, the *Indigent* from the *Full*, the *Weak* from the *Powerful*, or the *Distressed* from the friendly Relief of the *kindest Assistant*; this is the Circumstance in his Life, which we may, and we ought within our Sphere and Measure to *imitate*. If he *went about doing good*, made it his Business and his Calling, his Profession and his Practice; we, *as we have Opportunity*, should Gal.vi. 10. *do good to all Men*. The *Opportunity* should be considered as the *Call* of Providence, *opening a Door* to us, and commanding us to go upon the Service. If we cannot be persuaded to look out, as he did, for the Occasions of Good, to spend our selves and to be spent, as he was, in forming and in executing wondrous Schemes of Charity, for the Benefit of Mankind; yet when such Designs are elsewhere concerted, when such Occasions from Abroad come home to us, when we are in a Manner surrounded with the Objects of Mercy, and  
all

all our Difficulty consists in adjusting the Preference, and in chusing out of many *fit*, the very *fittest*; under these Circumstances to decline engaging in any Offices of *Good Will to Men*, is to *reverse* the Precedent instead of *pursuing* it, and to *affront* our blessed Lord's Example instead of *following* it. *He went about doing Good*; but we in this Case go out of our Way, on purpose to *avoid* it.

That the Practice therefore may bear some Analogy, some Resemblance to the main Design and Tenour of our Saviour's Life, in this important Branch of it, I purpose

I. To consider it under diverse Particulars, which may deserve your Notice, and, I hope, excite in you some like Dispositions.

II. My next Business shall be to enquire in what Ways and Methods any such Dispositions may be with Effect exerted; so as to become visible and useful in your Behaviour to one another.

III. I



III. I would lay before you some Motives which may incline you to the Imitation of this excellent Pattern.

I. I am to consider our Saviour's Life as employ'd *in doing good*, under diverse Particulars which may deserve your Notice, and, I hope, excite in you some like Dispositions.

1. Let us view it in the chief Design of it, which moved him to empty himself of the Glory which he had with his Father before the Foundations of the World. *For us Men and for our Salvation he came down from Heaven*, and was content to lead upon Earth a Life of Labour, Trouble and Affliction. It is glorious and laudable in the Sight of the World, when Men of Figure and Eminence will engage in Designs of Benignity or Compassion for Persons who move in a Sphere a good deal beneath them, tho' with very small Abatements of their own Ease or Dignity, from their utmost Condescensions. But now our Saviour is represented as the *only begotten Son of God*, who lay in the Bosom of

*his Father before all Ages, as the First-born of every Creature, the Brightness of everlasting Light, the Image of the invisible God, who made the Worlds and all Things in them, and hath had the Government of them all along upon his Shoulders; yet even this inconceivable Immenfity of Honour and Power did not hinder our compassionate Redeemer from engaging in our Interests with a vast Eclipse of his former Majesty and Grandeur; and when he took upon him to deliver Man, that single View reconciled him at once to all the Indignities of an obscure Birth, to all the Labours of a painful Life, and to all the Sufferings of an ignominious Death.*

Let the Proud and Pamper'd, who know no Use of their Bowels, but to glut and surfeit them, consider this wondrous Example of their Saviour's Love and Condescension; with what a mighty Expence and Self-Abasement, he provided for the Distresses of a People, as distant from himself, as Sin is from Holiness and Earth from Heaven; and then (if they can) let them treat their Brethren,

thren, Men like themselves, their Equals in the main Advantages of being, the joint Partakers of one common Nature, with Scorn and Insolence, with Indifference and Coldness, with a supercilious Neglect, or an haughty Reserve. Upon the View before us, this, one might well expect, should be impossible.

Let us then proceed and consider

2. *Secondly*, The Zeal wherewith our blessed Lord pursued his gracious Design for the Good of Mankind. We are hence-forwards to look upon him, not as in the *Form of God*, but as *appearing in the Fashion of a Man*, as leading an human Life, and liable to all its innocent Infirmities. For in such a Light as this, his Pattern is most likely to be copied, as it is here, indeed,

most capable of Imitation. As such, *he* Rom. xv.

*pleased not himself; he did not seek his own* 3.

*Will, but the Will of the Father which sent* John v.

*him; and did always those Things which* 30.

*pleased the Father. As such, he went about* Joh. viii.

*doing Good. He contented not himself* 29.

with that lean and negative Virtue of

doing no Evil; of giving no Cause of

Complaint against him by Mischief or

Injury



Injury offered to Mankind; but he sought out all Opportunities of being serviceable to them in their nearest and most pressing Interests; it was his *Meat and Drink*, the Business and Pleasure of his Life, to assist them in their several Distresses, and to relieve them in all their Wants. One so conscious of his own good Purposes for the Advantages of human Nature, and of all the Retainers to it, might colourably enough have insisted, that the Patient should have applied to the Physician, and the Person distemper'd have look'd out for that *sa-ving Help*, which then was coming *from the Lord*. But the Physician of Souls was too well acquainted with the several Frailties cleaving to them; and knew that one particular Infirmity, neither the least, nor the least prevailing with them would indispose them for accepting even the most friendly Offers of a Cure: He was therefore very sensible that, to render his Succours useful, he must enter upon a Course, which a Man of Humour or of Puncto might have call'd a Prostitution of them; that is, he must

must make a Tender of them, where, in divers Instances, he was sure they would be rejected. But his *Zeal* for the Good of Souls, overbore those low Considerations, which Selfishness or Passion, Vanity or Pride, might have cast into the Way of a very good Design: He proceeded accordingly with the most disinterested and warm Endeavours to promote the Welfare of those who scorned and insulted, as well as of those who receiv'd him with the Veneration due to him. This will ever be the Effect of a cordial Concern for the Success of any laudable and worthy Undertaking; that no little Objections, inferior to the Weight and Merit of the Thing in Question, shall ever be suffered to discourage or obstruct it. Where People have a mind to spare their Pains, it will always be easy to *feign*, or to *find*, a Reason for it: But a Man intent upon the God-like Work of *doing Good*, will not give Way to slight Impediments, where the Service depending is of great Importance, and undoubtedly superior to all the Obstacles which can rise up a-

Luke ii.  
48, 49.

Joh. ii, 14,  
— 18.

Pfal. lxxix.  
9.

gainst it. Remote or possible Consequences, even Difficulties or Dangers, which are near and probable, will little affect him, when his Heart is truly and affectionately attach'd to it. Our Saviour gave an early Specimen of the Byass which he meant should govern him in his After-Life, against all Counter-Per-suasions. — *Wist ye not* (said he to his Parents, who had sought him sorrowing, when they fancied they had lost him, *wist ye not*) that *I must be about my Father's Business?* He considered his *Father's Business* as his proper Employment; the most sensible, as well as the most rational Entertainment and Refreshment of his Spirit. Thus when, with infinite Hazard to his Person, he had drove out the Traders from the Temple, his Disciples very pertinently remember'd, and applied to him, that Passage in the holy Psalmist, *The Zeal of thine House hath eaten me up.* So earnest was he, and so indefatigable in the Work which God had given him to do, in Contempt of all Danger, and of all Opposition likely to attend it.

From a Principle of this Force and  
Liveliness,



Liveliness, we may well account in the

3. *Third Place*, for the Extent of our Saviour's Charity, which was confined to no single *Branch* of that fruitful *Root*, but was even as diffusive, as the Occasions were, which fell into the Way of it. For Example, Was the Ignorance of Man to be instructed? *The Son of God* <sup>1 Joh. v. 20.</sup> *hath given us an Understanding, that we may know him that is true; he hath brought* <sup>2 Tim. i. 10.</sup> *Life and Immortality to Light thro' the Gospel.* In every thing we are enriched by him, <sup>1 Cor. i. 5.</sup> in all Utterance and in all Knowledge; the <sup>Eph. i. 18.</sup> *Eyes of our Understanding* are by him enlightened, that we may know what is the Hope of his Calling, and what the Riches of the Glory of his Inheritance in the Saints. Finally, by him we may be filled with the <sup>Col. i. 9.</sup> Knowledge of his Father's Will in all Wisdom and spiritual Understanding. Was the Sinfulness of Man to be expiated, reformed and corrected? In him we have <sup>Eph. i. 7.</sup> *Redemption thro' his Blood, even the For-* <sup>8.</sup> *giveness of Sins, according to the Riches of his Grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us.* For this very Purpose the Son of God <sup>1 Joh. iii. 8.</sup> *was manifested, that he might destroy the*

Heb. x. 10. *Works of the Devil. By the Will of God*  
*we are sanctified, through the offering of*  
*the Body of Jesus once for all. He came*  
 Joh. x. 10. *that we might have Life; and that we*  
*might have it more abundantly; To seek*  
 Luk. xix. *and to save that which was lost; To preach*  
 10. *the Gospel to the Poor, to heal the Broken*  
 Luk. iv. *hearted, to preach Deliverance to the Cap-*  
 18, 19. *tive, and recovering of Sight to the Blind,*  
*to set at Liberty them that are bruised,*  
*and to preach the acceptable Year of the*  
*Lord.*

These were the noble public-spirited  
 Views which brought the Saviour of  
 the World to lead a Life in it of various  
 and complicated Sorrows. And that he  
 might see of the Travail of his Soul, he  
 spared no Pains which *human Prudence*  
 could suggest as *probable*, or *divine Wis-*  
*dom* recommend as *expedient*, to gain him  
 Success in the Cause depending. The  
 few with whom he could hold a per-  
 sonal Correspondence, had the Blessing  
 of his Instructions to inform them, of  
 his Admonitions to awaken them, and  
 of his seasonable Reproofs to reduce and  
 to reclaim them. They had the Power  
 of

of his Miracles to convince them of his Authority, and the Charms of his Conversation to sweeten and endear it. All this was propagated with a rare, industrious Concern, as of one who made it his avowed Employment, and his only Business. He lived only to *do Good*, and with *him* to *do Good* was to *enjoy* it: It was *Life*, and *all* to him.

I have just now mention'd his *Miracles*, and give me leave to observe from them in the

4. *Fourth* Place, one single Circumstance, with which I shall close this Head; and it is, that all of them were designed for *Use*, all exemplified a Temper benevolent and friendly to Mankind. None were intended for *Ostentation*; and none for *Terror*, except when Nature seemed to sympathize with the Convulsions of her Author, to tremble at his Agonies, and to give up the Ghost along with him. For the rest, the Cure of inveterate Distempers, and the Rescue of unhappy Mortals from the Maladies and Miseries to which a frail Constitution had render'd them obnoxious, make



make up the Sum of his Wonders and mighty Works.

A Lesson this to the great Ones of the Earth, for applying the Power wherewith a favourable Providence hath entrusted them, to the Benefit of human Society, and to the Comfort of those who stand in need of Relief or Protection from it. They are hence reminded, that the *Blaze* and *Glitter* of it are utterly insignificant, in Comparison with that indulgent well-temper'd *Heat* which should cheer and enliven all who approach it. They who do Good to be *seen of Men*, to have their Names and their Memorials celebrated to distant Generations, may reflect upon the usual Modesty attending our Saviour's Benefactions, *See thou tell it no Man.* And lest *Example* should have less Weight with them, he hath added to it a Caution in Terms express, *Take heed that ye do not your Alms before Men to be seen of them;* which he hath guarded with a Sanction as peremptory, speaking of such as should neglect it — *Verily I say unto you, they have their Reward;* the  
Meaning

Matt. viii.  
4.

Matt. vi. 1.

Ibid. v. 2.

Meaning of which he had just explained to them, that they should *have no Reward of his Father in Heaven.* Matt. vi. 1.

This he establish'd as a Rule of Modesty in *private* Benefactions, and as a Guard upon the Motives to those of a more *public* Nature; that no Leaven of Vanity should be suffer'd to mix with them; but for the rest, when this narrow Principle should be carefully excluded from them, he meant no farther Check upon any Advantages arising from a laudable, attractive Example; he had rather encouraged its auspicious Influences in a preceding Direction; *Let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.* Mat. v. 16

But lest an Objection should arise upon our Saviour's Practice from the Peculiarity of his Circumstances, and the Tenour of his extraordinary Commission; proceed we to enquire under my

II. *Second General*, in what Ways and Methods our good Dispositions may be with

with Effect exerted, so as to become visible and useful in our Behaviour to one another.

The great Point to be labour'd is the Attainment of a Frame and Temper of Spirit, resembling to some Degree that illustrious Pattern. For when this is once gained, the common Circumstances of human Life will open to us the Occasions of exerting and employing a benevolent Disposition; the Opportunities of which will easily find us, without giving us the Trouble of any laborious Enquiries after them. For Example,

I. Persons engaged in the regular Course of a proper Calling may encounter enough of Incidents and Adventures, to exemplify *what Manner of Spirit they are of*, to put their Inclinations upon full Proof and Test to measure the Narrowness or the Openness of their Hearts, to distinguish the griping and the selfish, from the frank and generous Disposition of Soul. A Man may serve God and his Neighbour too, whilst he serves *himself*, by filling the Station to which Providence hath called him, with Usefulness



fulness and Sufficiency, and by answering in a proper Manner the just Expectations of his Creator and Fellow-Creatures from him. Nor amidst the vast Variety of providential Dispensations, is any Post so mean, any Circumstance in Life so destitute and abandoned, which doth not furnish some Opportunities to the Person planted in it, of being in one Way or other serviceable to the World about him. Now this single Talent improved to the Purposes for which it was lent him, will procure him a more comfortable Audit at the Judgment Seat of *Christ*, than a thousand Talents profusely lavish'd, (as we often see them) in Pomp and Ostentation and the Pride of Life, without ministring to any valuable Ends of human Society, or to the Benefit of any one Retainer to it. Again,

2. The several Relations we stand engaged in to one another, will present us with a great Variety of Opportunities to *do Good*. Here our *natural* and *civil*, our domestic and political, our religious and social Obligations, will find Employment

ployment enough for the most extensive  
 Genius, the most fruitful in good Works,  
 and the most zealous for them. To dis-  
 charge the Duties which arise out of  
 Circumstances so manifold and so com-  
 plicated, from a conscientious Regard  
 to God, and an Abundance of good Will  
 to Men, will enter us upon a Province  
 diffusive enough for the Exercise of the  
 most boundless Charity, and will carry  
 us thro' the amiable Circle of every so-  
 cial Virtue. The Man who will do  
 good and answer thereby the Designs of  
 Heaven in all these Capacities, must be  
 fitted to adorn each Circumstance of  
 (Life allotted to him, to behave in it  
 with Honour to himself, with Advan-  
 tage and Usefulness to all concern'd with  
 him.

A Man of this Spirit will not confine  
 his benevolent Dispositions within the  
 narrow Boundaries of his own Relatives  
 or Domestics, of private Friendship or  
 personal Acquaintance; but

3. He will stretch them to all the Oc-  
 casions of which his Knowledge can in-  
 form him, and to which his Abilities  
 can

can extend his Help: The whole World is his Field, and a fair Opportunity is with him Invitation sufficient to engage his favourable and friendly Endeavours.

In the cheap and easy Offices of advising, exhorting, admonishing, and perhaps (when the Party concern'd doth not overhear them) of reproving too; if opprobrious, ill-natur'd Censure might wear the Name, in these, I say, the Nature of many, otherwise enough contracted, inclines them often to be prompt and forward, and even unask'd to be busy and interposing; but you touch upon the Apple of their Eye, when you would open their Purfes, and, like sensitive Plants, they shrink at your Approaches when you would engage them in a *small Contribution* even to the *best Designs*. These are so many and various, the Occasions so pressing, and so open to every Man's Observation; there are so many *naked* to be *cloathed*, *hungry* to be *fed*, Prisoners to be ransomed, Ignorant to be instructed, and a due Provision for the Service of the Gospel is so manifestly wanting in numerous Examples;



ples; withal Schemes are so well concerted for a regular Redress of most of the aforementioned Grievances, that many Hands might easily make light Work of what remains to finish them; since what from a single Person could have produced but little Benefit, may proceed a great Way with united Forces. Things are already (God be thanked) methodized and in Motion; and a Loan is open to receive whatever shall be cast into this Treasury for the Service of those who may severally stand in need of it: So that you have now less Trouble in doing Good than formerly, when you were to *contrive*, as well as *execute*, the *Means* of doing it to any valuable *End*. *Now* you need only put forth your *Hands*, as your *Hearts* shall direct you; and be assured, that your Views in it will be fully answered. But pray observe, that a willing Mind is never, in this Case, fond of Excuses or Objections; is always more ready to remove and answer, than to dwell or insist upon them. And now in the

III. *Third*

III. *Third* and last Place; if you are in Want of Motives which may incline you to follow the excellent Pattern in my Text:

1. Retire, I beseech you, for a while into your own Hearts, and consider how just you should think your own Expectations of Relief in any Distress or Exigence, which the World about you could easily afford to you; how hard and how unequal you should esteem your Lot, to see a large Proportion of your Brethren wallowing in Plenty, and ready to surfeit of great Abundance; whilst your selves were pinch'd with the Rigours of Want, sinking under a Load of Oppressions and Sorrows, without any Offers of Assistance from them, or any friendly Tokens of their favourable Compassion. Would not the killing Reflection upon their Coldness and Inhumanity, add Weight to your Burden, and give you a new pungent Sense of your several Misfortunes? Would you not be apt to plead your Relation to them as Fellow-Creatures, and Fellow-

Christians, as born to the same immortal Hopes with them, and equally with them the Objects of your Saviour's Love? Would you not expostulate with them their Breach of the Trust reposed in them by a gracious Providence, which certainly meant to fill up with the *Superfluities* of some, that unsightly Gap which is made in the Order of Things by the *Necessities* of others?

Mat. vii.  
12.

These Arguments (in your own Case) you would certainly esteem conclusive of the Point they aim at; you would expect from the Force of them a Supply of your respective Wants, and would *grudge if you were not satisfied. Therefore all Things, whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.* The Offices of Charity are transformed by this Principle into *Acts of Justice.*

2. From this Retirement into your own Hearts you may proceed with the more Advantage to take a Prospect of the World about you: And from the Situation of Things and of Persons in it, you



you will easily perceive, that the great Law of Benevolence is the prime and fundamental Law of *Nature*, which the Dispensation of *Grace* never meant to abolish; but rather to improve and to refine it. Nature her self received her Birth and Being from the Exuberance of divine Love: And it is fit that the same Principle which *created* the World should *govern* it. Let it be supposed that this Principle universally prevail'd in it; what a beautiful Scene of Things would be hence presented to us? How would the Blessings of Humanity and Peace, enrich our barren Soil, ennoble it with the Felicities of Paradise, clear up this dirty Spot for us, and plant upon Earth some Fruits of the Growth of Heaven? From a contrary View, and from a Supposal of our living in *Variance and Discord*, *Malice and Envy*, *hateful and hating one another*, how unamiable and ghastly is the frightful Prospect? Upon this Representation Wolves and Tygers are less terrible to Mankind, than Mankind is to it self, because (whatever *their Fierce-*

ness is) *they* have less *Skill* and *Cunning* in the hellish Arts of Mischief.

The same Disposition then, which moved the Creator of all Things to give us a *Being*, must suppose in him a Desire of our *Well-being* also, and consequently of our observing those Rules and Measures in our Conduct, which are essential to the Order and good Government of reasonable and sociable Creatures. Our Reason at first View enters into the Force and Spirit of this Obligation.

Now the Souls, and Bodies, and Fortunes of our Neighbours, are the only Respects wherein we can be supposed to profit them. And our Assistance lent out to any one of these upon proper Motives, is entitled to its Measure of Praise and Blessing. How much more, when the Help so extended is comprehensive enough to reach them all at once? And this, without magnifying, is truly and strictly the Case before you. For

Tho' they are but Scantlings of Knowledge which are hence convey'd to the Understandings of our Youth, (and therefore

therefore can never be thought too much even for the meanest of our People) yet a good Foundation here is laid upon which it will be in their Power to build any farther Improvements. But without this Ground-work it would be impossible for them to make the least Advances.

Their early Subjection to Rule and Discipline is a just Encouragement to our Hope, that their *Morals* may hence be brought within due Regulations. And the *Principles of the Doctrine of Christ* which they here imbibe, will spread, we trust, a favourable Influence upon their future Practice. So that this Consideration improves your Acts of *Charity* into Offices of *Piety*, and the Effects of your Benevolence to *Man* become hence Expressions of your Duty to *God*; since you thus in earnest exemplify the Truth of your Desires, that his *Kingdom may come, and his Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven.*

Now as their *Souls* have this Provision made for them, which otherwise we can hardly conceive would have been



made at all; so their *Bodies* and their *Fortunes* have hence a due Proportion of Care bestowed upon them, in the Rayment supplied to the *one*, and in the Preparations wherewith they are furnish'd for an innocent Pursuit of the *other*. Even to Persons of better Figure in Life, who need no Calling for their Support and Maintenance, it proves often the standing Grievance of their Days, that they were never *taught*, or would never *learn* how to spend or to employ them. Wherefore if *Idleness* be the *Bane* of *Virtue*, *Business*, one would think, should prove its *Nursery*. But *Subsistence*, it is certain, must hence be furnish'd to those who want it, or it will be sought elsewhere in destructive Resorts; and the *Hands* must be inured to *Labour*, which would otherwise seek their *daily Bread* in the *less toilsome Arts* of *picking and stealing*.

And the Age upon which it is now propounded to employ your *Bounty*, makes it yet more extensive; as being most *helpless* and yet most capable of improving by seasonable *Helps*. So that  
what

what you now shall do for these destitute little Ones, may reach in its Effects to the Children which are yet unborn. And when you are returned to the Dust from whence you were taken, the Seed which you now are sowing, may still be multiplying and spreading its Increase. The Structure you now are raising, may proceed upon your Foundations; and you may bring up these to bring up others after them in a perpetual Succession, till Time shall be no more.

Wherefore when you are giving upon an Occasion of this Importance, so beneficial in its Design and so extensive in its Consequences, you will remember, I hope, that it is no ordinary nor common Charity; that it is not only *suffering little Children* to come to *Christ*, but *bringing* them to him, and thro' his Means bringing Souls to God; that it is not only the Supply of one single Want, but a Relief of manifold and complicated Necessities; that it is not only a Provision for a Day, a Month, a Year, or any limited Season, but that the Advantages of your present Libera-

lity are calculated for the Lives of its respective Objects; that not only these your humble Supplicants are for Life concerned in it; but all whom they shall be enabled by it to assist in the like or any other Extremities; that not only the Objects which may hereafter feel, thro' the Hands of these your Petitioners, the Effects of your present Bounty, but others after them, even to latest Posterity, thro' a successive Continuance of these charitable Designs, may partake in the Effects of them, and glorify our common *Father, who is in Heaven.*

Suffer me therefore to intreat and to conjure you, by the Bowels of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, by the Ties of Humanity, and the Bonds of Religion, by the Mercies you enjoy, and the Miseries you may feel, by all the Regards of Brotherhood and the Compassions due to our common Nature, that you would lend us your chearful Aid for the Support and Encouragement of this useful Scheme.

So may the Blessing of God reward your Labour of Love with an Increase of all spiritual and temporal Advantages;

So



# S E R M O N XIV.

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So may the Prayers and Praises of those whom your Alms shall relieve in the Day of their Necessity, be presented on your Behalf with Acceptance at the Throne of Grace.

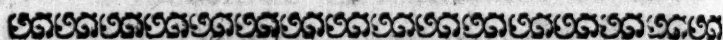
Finally; so may the Remembrance of your charitable and pious Benefactions, support you in your last Extremities, and minister to you the Comfort you are most in want of at the Hour of Death and in the Day of Judgment.



S E R M O N



## SERMON XV.



2 COR. xii. 9.

—*My Grace is sufficient for thee;  
for my Strength is made perfect  
in Weakness.*—



**I**T will be hard, at this Distance, to determine what the particular Temptation, or Affliction was, which St. Paul here describes as a *Messenger of Satan*, sent to humble and to mortify him, lest he should be *exalted above Measure thro' the Abundance of those*

those *Revelations*, wherewith he was favour'd. Whether (as it has been conjectured) it were any outward and bodily Infirmary, which rendered his Person *Mean* and his *Speech Contemptible*, and thereby his Agency in the Gospel naturally the less effectual; or whatever else may be supposed to have lain heavy upon the Mind of our Apostle; the *Moral* of the whole Transaction conveys to us many Truths of Consequence, and is fairly applicable to the Circumstances of common Life.

Meanwhile, the Difficulty, we may observe, was not removed at the Apostle's Instance, but he had an Assurance of sufficient Help to support him; and a Reason suggested to him, why he should continue under it. Since the weaker Instrument he was in *the Hand of God*, the more visibly would the *Hand of God* appear in the Success of his Ministry.

The *Grace of God*, in the Text, and usually indeed elsewhere, is not confined to any single Species, any one Sort, of Assistances vouchsafed from God to Man; but it means *Favour* in the general



ral; and so extends to all the particular Instances, wherein the Favour of God is wanted, and may be exemplified. Wherefore *Grace to help in Time of Need*, is as various and manifold as the *Needs* may be, which it is applied to answer. And thus,

When God is represented in the Text, as replying upon our Apostle, *My Grace is sufficient for thee*; the *Grace* is relative to the Circumstance, which stood in Want of it; and the *one* cannot be known without the *other*, because they were doubtless accommodated the *one* to the *other*.

But thus much, in general, we may safely hence conclude; that the God who is *no Respector of Persons*, will favourably behold, and succour his whole Family, in all the Circumstances which shall require his heavenly Aid. So that it shall be in no Man's Power, to plead Necessity for his Sin, or the Want of any requisite Preventions to have secured him from it.

What was here promised to St. Paul in a Case distinguish'd, will be made good

good to every sincere Disciple of *Christ Jesus*, proportionably to their several Exigencies and Wants; and the *Grace* which was *sufficient for him* in an extraordinary Juncture, will be extended to all *sufficiently*, in the ordinary Occurrences of human Life.

So that, be *Temptations* what they will, if the *Assistance* rises in Proportion to the *Difficulty*, there is hence no Subterfuge nor *Cloak for Sin*. And by *Assistance* here, I mean not only that *inward Succour*, whereby the Spirit of God inclines the Hearts of Men to Obedience; but whatever Helps besides have been, are, or shall be furnished, by a favourable Providence towards keeping them within the Rule of Duty. The *Grace*, the favourable Provision made by God for this Purpose is fully *sufficient* for it.

And that this may appear in its proper Light, I must desire you to consider with me,

I. The *Provisions*, which have severally been made for restraining us from Sin.

II. The

II. The *Sufficiency* of these Provisions; for the End designed by them.

III. The *Conditions* whereupon the *Efficacy* of them is suspended — From all which in the

IV. *Fourth* Place, I shall deduce such Inferences, as the Text, with the Occasion of it, will fairly warrant.

I. We are to consider the *Provisions* which have severally been made by God, for restraining us from Sin; such for Instance are,

1. Natural Light.
2. Reveal'd Declarations.
3. Providential Interposals.
4. The inward Supports and Assistances of God's Holy Spirit.

1. Natural Light is one of the Provisions made by God for restraining us from Sin.

Nor let any Man wonder, that I place this amongst other Examples of God's *Grace* and Favour to the Sons of Men. For surely it may with great Propriety and Fitness be reckoned amongst the Instances of his good Will  
to



to us, that he has created us with Capacities for knowing the Relation we stand in to him, and for discerning between Good and Evil.

More of this we had doubtless understood, and our Knowledge would have reach'd more deeply into our Practice, if we had cultivated and improved (as we ought to have done) the Disposition wherewith we were intrusted.

Still, however, there is a Repugnancy left, in natural Conscience, to the more flagrant Degrees of Wickedness; and a Man must in some Measure conquer his *Constitution*, before he can arrive at them. His *very Complexion* is a Guard to him, 'till repeated Custom hath hardened his *Heart* and his *Face* together; and whenever Reason is consulted, there is thence such an inexhaustible Fund of Dissuasives from the bold Adventure, that he must silence his *Understanding*, before his *Will* can be brought over to it. *That God is, and that he is a Rewarder of such as diligently seek him*, and that he will distinguish one Day, between those  
who

who *seek*, and those who *neglect* him; these are the first Principles of Religious Knowledge, of which no Man is left without a competent Witness. There is no one Property more *peculiarly*, more *inseparably* cleaving to human Nature, than the Knowledge of these first Principles. It amounts almost to the Efficacy of *Instinct*; and a Man will be hard put to it, to maintain his Character, or to make good his Title to being one of the *Species*, who disclaims his Share in these common Sentiments. But,

2. We have, added to the Dictates of *Natural Light*, the *reveal'd Declarations* of God, to restrain us from Sin, and to make us fruitful in every Virtue. What was more obscurely and faintly represented by the one, has receiv'd from the other an Increase of Weight and Evidence. It was always credible upon the Foot of common Sense and Reason, that God would reward and punish hereafter the Behaviour of Men upon the present Scene; but now he has expressly proclaim'd his Intentions, and his Denunciations carry the strongest Weight with

with 'em, from the Degree and Measure, wherein his Threats and Promises are respectively propounded; and the Terms of our Acceptance are so clearly set forth to us, that we cannot easily mistake 'em, nor want the Satisfaction of knowing when we do his Will. And the whole Complex of our Duty is bound upon us, by such engaging, endearing, inviting Motives, that we must be lost to all Sense of Gratitude, and abandon our own most apparent Interests, whenever we depart from it. So that if we duly attend to the *Precepts* of the Gospel, we shall thence be instructed how to please our Maker: If to its *Motives*; we shall thence be excited by our most prevailing Passions, to behave and to do accordingly. These are Things which have a natural Tendency to produce the desired Effect, and to make us *holy in all Manner of Conversation*. Tho' there be Temptations which would persuade us otherwise, yet, if we will use our Reason and hear attentively both Sides of the Question, the Scale of Religion will doubtless preponderate; Again,



3. Left the standing Encouragements of Virtue should prove too weak to gain us, there are frequent *Interposals* of a gracious *Providence*, either presenting us with favourable Occasions, or removing the Temptation which would prove too hard for us, or awakening in us a powerful Sense of the Danger which will attend it, or stopping the Course of Sin by observable Checks, and by various Methods of heavenly Discipline.

*Revelation* hath so clearly evinced the Fact to us, and given so many Instances of these providential Dealings, that there can be no room for Doubt in it, whilst we accept its Evidence. Nor is there any thing in *Reason*, which should render the Thing incredible; since whatever tends to the Improvement of our reasonable Nature will enter very properly within the Care of Heaven. Nor can the minutest Transactions be supposed to escape the Inspection of an Omniscient, Omnipresent Spirit; nor can his Inspection be conceiv'd without some Agency or other, such as is consistent with the Condition of the Creatures

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tures who are concern'd in it, and tends to their Good.

And doubtless, if we would observe with Accuracy the Process of Things, we should find our *Experience* concurring with this *rational Prospect*; and should distinguish in the various Incidents of Life and Fortune the Hand which directs them, and the Ends to which they minister. Even in the most unpleasing Dispensations, we should see Reason to be thankful, when we should perceive their Subserviency to the *Use of edifying*; as the more favourable Indulgences of Heaven would lift up our Hearts to God in Gratitude and Praise, instead of ministering to Excess and Riot.

In these and all other Instances the *Grace* of God may be in vain dispens'd to us; and what was design'd for our *Health*, may be perverted into an *Occasion of our Fall*. Thus Afflictions, which were design'd to humble us, may harden and enrage us; and the Felicities of Life, which were mercifully intended to display the Virtues of a prosperous Con-

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dition,

dition, may end in a licentious Forgetfulness of the Hand which furnish'd them. But the *Inefficacy* of Grace doth by no Means prove its *Insufficiency*. Good Opportunities do not cease to be so, because they are not laid hold of. The Bounty of the *Giver* doth indeed inflame the Ingratitude of an unworthy *Receiver*; yet the Unworthiness of the *Receiver* reflects no Disparagement upon the Bounty of the *Giver*. But then he who abuses the *Mercies* of Providence, should remember always, that he is thence obnoxious to its *Justice*.

4. And finally; because, after all the *external* Helps which are afforded to Virtue, the Frailties of Nature might prove too stubborn and masterly for other Impressions; therefore the Spirit of God hath graciously condescended to *help our Infirmities*, and to *strengthen us with Might in the inner Man*. Grace, I have said, is a *General* Word, and signifies *Favour* at large, without being restrain'd to any particular Instance of exhibiting that *Favour*. The Word, as it stands in Scripture, hath been often misinterpreted to



a *particular* Meaning, when its Sense is really more *general*; and thus the Doctrine of *inward Assurances* hath received a Prejudice, from a wrong Defence of it, and from improper Attempts to prove and to establish it. For indeed the Word *Grace* doth seldom signify these *inward Assurances*, otherwise than as they are included in that *general Grace* of God, which is exhibited to us by the Gospel of his Son.

But yet *inward Assurances* are plainly ascribed in holy Scripture to the Spirit of God; and the Notion of them was current even in the Gentile Religion: Indeed the Want of them was felt, so that there was no denying it; and an Hope was thence conceived upon the Mercies of the supreme Being, that he would favourably supply it. And we meet accordingly with frequent Addresses made to him for that Purpose, as well in *Heathen* as in *Christian* Writings. So that if natural Light shines too obscurely, or if its Influences are too feeble to reach the Heart; if the Word of God doth not sink deep enough for want of a close and

vigorous Application, or if the gracious Interposals of his *Providence* miss of their proper Efficacy thro' the Heedlesness and Inadvertency, wherewith they are attended to; yet the *Spirit of God* can attack the *Spirit of Man* in its closest Retirements; can discern the secret Motives and Affections of the Soul; can hold it intent upon the great Inducements to Virtue; can brighten up to it the Dimness of natural Light, and make it shine in upon him with a Meridian Lustre; can apply the Threats and Promises of the Gospel so powerfully to his Conscience, that they shall pierce it to the Quick, and divide assunder his Joints and Marrow; and finally, can give such an Edge to the Dealings of his *Providence*, as shall force the Sinner upon *Recollection* and *Forecast*. These are tried Methods, which are always sufficient for the Purposethey are design'd to answer; tho' the Perverseness and Obstinacy of human Nature may often disappoint them of their proper Efficacy. And thus by *Reason* and *Revelation*, by his *Providence* and by his *Spirit*, the *Grace of God* makes various

Attempts upon us, to gain us, if possible by any Means, to our Interest and Duty.

These are severally the Provisions made to fence and to secure our Virtue.

Proceed we therefore under my

II. *Second* General, to consider, The *Sufficiency* of these Provisions for the End designed by them.

Here we may expect to encounter the old Objection, which forms its Complaint upon the Prevalence of natural Passions; upon the incurable Contrariety between *Inclination* and *Duty*; and thence, at lowest, would represent the Case of Mankind, as exceedingly *pitiable*, if not quite *excusable*.

Wherefore to give this Argument its proper Weight, I must intreat you to consider with me the following Particulars.

I. That the *Difficulties* of Virtue, be they what they will, are not, however, *invincible*.



2. That God may with the highest Justice and Equity, demand the utmost Exercise of our Powers in his Service.

3. That the main Instance of Obedience, which he hath in *Fact* required from us, and which are most complained of, are in themselves of intrinsic Worth and Necessity.

4. And upon the whole, that the Helps to Religion are superior to its Hindrances, if we do not turn the Balance, by a chosen Indulgence to vicious Propensities.

1. Then, I observe, that the *Difficulties* of Virtue, be they what they will, are not however *invincible*. *Experience* proves to us, that they have been conquer'd in manifold Examples; nor has any Age or Country been destitute of some *shining Lights*, which have adorn'd the Religion they have profess'd by a distinguish'd Practice. Even of those who most object the Power of native Passions, it may be well demanded, whether there are not many Considerations, which might be propounded of sufficient Weight to prevail against them? Ask,  
for

for Instance, the greatest Voluptuary, whether he might not be bought off from his Pleasures for a valuable Price, or deterred from them by an imminent and shocking Danger. Ask the Glutton, or the Drunkard, if Poyson were in their Meat or Cup, whether they would not abstain from it, and bear even great Extremities of Thirst or Hunger, rather than risque such a fatal Consequence. Ask the most Revengeful, whether he would gratify his desperate Rage, at the certain Expence of his Estate and Life. Ask any Man, the most bent upon Sin, whether diverse Restraints of a *temporal* Nature, nearly affecting his Honour, his Life, his Health, or his Fortune, would not persuade him to deny himself in the prohibited Example, however otherwise inviting or pleasant to him.

Now if this be so, as doubtless it is so, we may push our Question a little farther ; and ask him, why the Threats and Promises of the Gospel are so little persuasive, when Inducements of a lower Nature are suffer'd to carry such a decisive Influence? Why, is it pretended  
that

that the Difficulties of Religion are utterly *unsurmountable*, when yet it must be confessed, that diverse Cases may be put, wherein they are plainly and clearly *conquerable*? These are Inconsistencies which will not be brought to pair well together.

Is it then, that the Motives are defective, which are propounded respectively to Vice and Virtue? That can hardly be the Case; because it will not be easy to find out what Motives could have been more strongly pointed. Or is it Distance and Uncertainty, which in Practice weaken their Efficacy? This perhaps may be found to prevail in Practice, tho' it cannot defend it self upon *Principle*; nor would it ever prevail in *Practice*, without a good deal of liking to the other Side of the Question. For at last the most distant Good hath a Proportion of Value due to it; and the Measure even of the most *distant*, bears a current Price according to the Estimate made of it, when it shall become *present*.

Now if this be a just Calculation of Things; what will a *temporary Distance* detract



detract from the intrinsic Worth of a *future eternal Weight of Glory*? So very little, that it deserves no Name. Much less should it claim the Ascendant in our Conduct. Nor should *Uncertainty* enter into the Account of those, who daily risque more than their Religion requires of them, upon Terms of far greater *Uncertainty*. These are Topics which will not stand the Test of *Argument*, but they slip into *Practice* (it should seem) thro' mere Inadvertency, or rather from Affections very much devoted to the other Interest. This is therefore the *one Thing needful* to be regulated. And if this were once adjusted, the rest of our Way would be smooth and easy, and, after a little Use of it, infinitely *delightful*. There is no arguing against Experience. The Case before us is a tried one. When we see the Difficulties of Virtue *actually conquer'd*, we are sure they are not *invincible*. But it is no Proof at all on the other Side of the Question, that we see some Men foil'd by them; inasmuch as this may be owing to their Want of Constancy and Courage, and of using proper

proper Means for their own Defence. Helps we are sure there are which may be had for seeking them; and we are no less sure of their *Sufficiency*, because it has been prov'd, upon Tryal made of them, in various Encounters. Let those look to it who find them *ineffectual*; since where the Provisions themselves are chargeable with no Defect, the *Use*, or the *Abuse* of them rather, must account for the Miscarriage. Because

2. With the highest Justice and Equity, God may demand the utmost Exercise of our Powers in his Service.

As the *Author* of them, he may *claim* the Use of them: And accordingly he hath in Fact demanded, that we should *love him with all our Souls and with all our Might*.

The Extent of our Faculties to their proper Pitch, is the fittest and best Application of them: And no Service but God's will thus extend them. The World may *employ*, but it cannot *fill* them; it may *divert* and *amuse*, but it cannot *satisfy* them. So that if we come into the World under any Obligations

to

to a superior Power, the Trust repos'd in us must punctually be fulfilled. The Talents lent us ; the Opportunities we have of doing good, and of rising up to the Dignity of our rational Natures; are the common Obligations which we bring into the World with us, and can never disengage from, so long as we retain our Beings, and have the Means of answering these Obligations within our Reach and Power.

So that whatever proves the Duties of Religion to be within our Power, proves upon us the Necessity of performing them. And whatever Helps are afforded for enabling us to discharge them, do increase at the same Time the Measures of our Duty, and inflame the Guilt of our slighting or transgressing it. There is therefore in this Case no Medium between *impracticable*, and *indispensable*. If it be *possible*, it is *necessary* likewise; and when all Things are duly calculated, there will be found no Hardship in the Demand, which is made upon us.

For let it, I beseech you, be consider'd,

3. That



3. That the main Instances of Obedience which are in Fact required from us, and most complain'd of, are in themselves of intrinsic Necessity and Worth.

What a Sort of Place this World would be, if the Laws of Virtue were universally insulted, we may with too much Probability conjecture, from those partial Advances which are made towards it. The *Miseries* of human Life, are generally owing to the *Sins* of it. The Man, who thinks *Revenge* the *sweetest*, and *Forgiveness of Injuries* the *hardest* Obligation, would change his Opinion, were the Case reversed, and himself the Person of whom Vengeance were to be taken. He would easily then be sensible, how apt each Man is to misjudge the Merits of a Cause, in which himself is interested; and consequently how unfit to take a Matter into his Hand, where the Verdict given is likely to prove so partial. Fix in the same Manner where you please, upon any one Instance of Moral Duty, and the *Reason* of it will be as visible as the *Obligation*; and the Mischief of transgressing it, as observable

ble as *either*. So that God hath not dealt *arbitrarily* with his Creatures in prescribing to them the Measures of their *Duty*. Whatever he might have done by Virtue of his uncontrollable and sovereign Power; 'tis evident in Fact, that he hath used it with Clemency and Mercy, and the World would be much the worse for any Relaxations of it: Since it could not be relax'd to *one Man*, without *another's* claiming for himself like Privilege also; and a *general Relaxation* would be *general Destruction*.

If therefore the Law could not be chang'd without infinite Inconvenience; the only remaining Complaint must be, that human Nature is so averse to it. Which is indeed partly true, tho' the Truth of it implies in human Nature a great Share of Guilt: Because this Aversion is (a good deal of it) contracted by chosen Acts, and by customary Practice. What of it is *Native*, is enough accounted for by the Posture we stand in, of Candidates for another World, who are to approve our respective Fittnesses for the Exercise of consummate  
Virtue,

Virtue, by such Degrees of it as are here attainable.

And doubtless if we *press'd forwards* in earnest to the *Mark of our Prize*; the same, or less than the same Labour and Assiduity which we apply successfully to our other Pursuits, would gain this Point for us, and safely *enter* us into the *Joy of our Lord*. We take often more Pains for this World, and yet lose our Labour, than we need take for the other, without any Danger of a Disappointment. For

4. And upon the whole; the *Helps* to Religion are superior to its *Hindrances*, if we do not turn the Balance by a chosen Indulgence to vicious Propensities. Now no Man ought to complain of what is within his Power to remedy.

Let him stand bent for a while in a Posture contrary to these Propensities; and he will find the Inducements to Sin will be gradually weakened by his resolute Opposition to them.

If the Force of Things *sensible and present* be found prevailing against Things *invisible and distant*; yet somewhat in  
this



this Case may be obtain'd from *Reason*, upon a just Estimate made of their prodigious Disproportion. The *Word of God* will confirm us yet farther in the inestimable Value of the one above the other; and will furnish our Reason with great Variety of Inducements for preferring the *Glory which shall be reveal'd* before the present Glitter of temporal Good. *Providential Junctures* may open Scenes to us, which will naturally call off our Affections from this World, and fix them upon the other. *The Spirit of God*, if we ask it of him, will subdue the Reluctances of Flesh and Blood, and bring into Captivity each counter-acting Passion.

We may, for our selves, make some Stand against the Temptations of the World, and shall be enabled to stand the firmer, for having made any Stand at all. We have *Reason* always with us in this important Struggle; and this to a reasonable Creature should be no small Encouragement.

*Providential Occasions* may well and fitly be set in the Balance against any

Vol. I. C c Tempta-

Temptations which the *World* can present to us.

The Motives which *Sin* can propound to us are infinitely outbid by the Offers of the Gospel. And whatever the *Lust of the Flesh*, the *Lust of the Eyes*, or the *Pride of Life* may suggest to us, should fall, one would think, as *Dagon* did before the *Ark of the Lord*, and be overborn by the superior Influence of his blessed Spirit.

All this, 'tis confessed, may fail us, if we are wanting to our selves. But it is insisted, that this is *sufficient* if we do our Parts, and that we are not destitute of any necessary Helps.

'Tis true, that in this View of the Question, the Efficacy of *divine Grace* is represented as depending upon the *Will* of the *human Agent*; which yet reflects no such Disparagement upon the *Sovereignty and Glory* of God, as would be reflected upon his *Goodness*, by supposing him to bring into the World a Race of Creatures under a Necessity of being for ever miserable, through the Want of *necessary Means* to preserve them from  
being

being so. I observe moreover, that the *Glory and Sovereignty* of God are Attributes less intelligible to us than his *Goodness*.

Yet it is not (we think) inconsistent with the *Glory* of any Sovereign, that some of his Subjects should abuse their Privilege, and thence become obnoxious to the Edge of his Laws. It would, we apprehend, reflect upon his *Goodness*, and therefore upon his *Glory* too, if, after having forced us upon a Subjection to his Laws, he should lay us under an Impossibility of observing them, and then should take the Forfeiture of our breaking them.

But waving any farther Prosecution of the Dispute; let us be all persuaded to use a becoming Diligence in *making our Calling and Election sure*; and then we may safely warrant the Consequence, that the *necessary Means* will be never wanting.

Let us do our Parts, and God on his Part will not fail us. He will *stablish and strengthen* us, when we are *weak and*



*wavering, and will preserve us holy and unproveable in his Sight.*

It only remains to be consider'd, upon what Conditions the *Efficacy* of his *Grace* is suspended. But this, with the Inferences from the whole Argument, must be defer'd to a farther Opportunity.



SERMON



## SERMON XVI.

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2 COR. xii. 9.

*My Grace is sufficient for thee ;  
for my Strength is made perfect  
in Weakness.*



**W**HAT was undertook for at my Entrance upon this Argument, was to show, that the Grace, or the favourable Provision made by God, for restraining us from Sin, was sufficient for the Purposes it was designed to answer:

Here therefore it seemed requisite to consider what these Provisions severally were; and they were observ'd to be chiefly these four:

1. Natural Light.
2. Reveal'd Declarations. And
3. Providential Interposals.
4. The inward Supports and Assistances of God's Holy Spirit.

The next Point then to be discussed, was

II. The *Sufficiency* of these *Provisions* for the *End* designed by them. Now because

The old Objection here would necessarily meet us; which is founded on the Prevalence of natural Passions, and on the Difficulties thence arising in the Course of Duty; I thought it might be proper to observe to you, the following Particulars.

1. That the *Difficulties* of Virtue, be they what they will, are not however *invincible*.
2. That God may with the highest Justice and Equity, demand the utmost Exercise of our Powers in his Service.
3. That



3. That the main Instances of Obedience, which he hath in Fact required from us, and which are most complain'd of, are in themselves of intrinsic Worth and Necessity.

4. And upon the whole, that the *Helps* to Religion are superior to its *Hindrances*, if we do not turn the Balance by a chosen Indulgence to vicious Propensities.

These were severally the Topics which I thought might illustrate the *Sufficiency* of the Provisions made against Sin.

What farther remains of this Argument, is to consider under my

III. *Third* General; upon what Conditions the *Efficacy* of them is suspended. And

IV. *Lastly*, To deduce such Inferences, as the Text with the Occasion of it will fairly warrant. Now

The Conditions are only these Two.

1. A good Will to the Service required of us.

2. An honest Diligence in the Use of proper Means for enabling us to discharge it.

1. A good Will to the Service required from us, is one of the Conditions, whereupon the Promise of *sufficient Grace* is suspended.

'Tis indeed impossible, that any Difficulty should be conquer'd, without a good Will to conquer it. *Inclination* in the Order of Things must precede *Endeavour*; nor is it imaginable we should be ever *obedient*, except we are *willing* and desirous to be so.

If the whole Business of Religion were entirely within our Power, and needed no Assistance of any Kind to further it; yet it would apparently be necessary to any Progress in it, that we should have it much at Heart, and be a good deal solicitous for the important Issue. The Impediments in this Case are so well known, and their Power is so much complain'd of, that there can be no Prospect of getting over them, where the Mind is not stedfastly and deeply bent upon it. Nor is it reasonable to think,

think, that the Spirit of God should interpose with overbearing Influences for the Cure of chosen Indispositions, or of rooted and strong Aversions. If the Will be rightly turn'd, and favourably inclin'd to the Interests of Virtue, there is Room and Reason for expecting all necessary Helps.

It is in *Practice* as in *Doctrine*. If any Man *will* do his Will, *i. e.* if he inclines to do it, and his Affections are well disposed to it, *he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God \**.

And there is the same Reason, the same Foundation of Hope for *Practice*; that *good Inclinations* will ever be assisted with *sufficient Helps*; that a Man who is desirous of pleasing God, shall at no Time be destitute of the proper Means; and that the Difficulties which occur in the Course of Duty, shall not prove invincible to the Man who is in earnest solicitous to master them. For to *them that obey him, God giveth the Holy Ghost.*

Acts v. 32:

\* Εὰν τις θέλῃ, John vii. 16.



But to suppose the Gift bestow'd without any Distinction were to suppose it bestow'd at random. If the Offers of saving Grace were made indifferently, as well where there were *no* Disposition, as where there *is* a Disposition to embrace them; the Dispensation would look too humorous and fanciful; and too much Occasion would thence either be *given* or *taken*, for a Neglect or Misuse of Natural Talents.

But now to *him that hath*, it is expressly promised, that *more shall be given*; so that he has encouragement to use and improve his Original Stock. The Foundation of Virtue is laid in a *good Will* to it; where *that* is once settled and riveted deep into the Soul, the After-Practice is easy and agreeable. What a Man does with his own Liking comes always from him with Fluency and Pleasure. It is so in the *Natural*, and in the *Spiritual* Account of Things. The *Spirit of God* moves ever most successfully where the *Nature of Man* is most concurring with him. Because his Assistance

stance is rather *improving* and *furthering*, than *forcible* and *over-bearing*.

Where a Man listens with Attention, he is likely to find most Profit. And where he desires to learn, he is in the fairest way to make large Advances in Knowledge.

This is a reasonable Prospect from the Nature of Men and Things.

Nor is there any Ground of believing, that the Spirit of God will make a Change in them, or force his Way to a Heart which is disinclin'd to receive him.

His *Inward Succours* will be dispensed in all Likelihood, with some Similitude and Correspondence to his *outward Helps*. Wherefore, as the *Word* of God is defeated of its Influence, where there is no previous Disposition to *receive* it; so it is probable will his *Spirit* be, where there is no Preparation of Heart to *obey* his Motions. The *Will* may be *quickened* and *excited*; but it can't be forced. Yet,

2. Tho' a good Will be a Condition requisite to the *Efficacy* of Divine Grace, it is not alone *sufficient* for the Purpose. The *unregenerate* Person described by  
St. Paul

St. Paul, in the Conclusion of his seventh Chapter to the *Romans*, seems not to have wanted a Sense of his unhappy Case, nor yet hearty Wishes for a Change in it, and these, with Time and farther Care, will probably produce the desired Alteration. But then more must go to it, than *good Will* or *Wishes*; which must have added to them, an *honest Diligence* in the Use of proper Means for enabling us to conquer the Difficulties of Religion.

Phil. ii.  
12, 13.

It was St. Paul's Advice to his *Philippians*; *Work out your own Salvation with Fear and Trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good Pleasure.*

If the *Assistance of God* were in no Degree suspended upon the *Concurrence of Man*, this Advice would carry with it no Emphasis, nor Meaning. But suppose the *one* a *Condition* of the *other*, the Exhortation *then* will be clear and cogent; and will amount to somewhat like this which follows:

“ If you are diligent on your Parts,  
“ God will on his enable you to dis-  
“ charge



“ charge your Duty. Therefore, con-  
 “ sider, I beseech you, the infinite Im-  
 “ portance of your eternal Welfare; and  
 “ labour with all becoming Industry  
 “ and Solicitude to engage in it. Let  
 “ no Difficulties deter you from a Work  
 “ of such Consequence and Necessity;  
 “ but rest assured of being furnish’d  
 “ with Helps *sufficient* to make you *more*  
 “ *than Conquerors*, if you will but *serve*  
 “ *in earnest for the Mastery.*”

Here at last the main Strefs of Re-  
 ligion lies in this Contention and Strug-  
 gle for the Victory.

And because it is a Point of the high-  
 est Moment to the Success of our spi-  
 ritual Engagements, you will give me  
 leave to deduce it somewhat more par-  
 ticularly; and to observe, upon such  
 as complain of the mighty Hardships  
 which attend Religion,

1. That they often take more Pains;
2. Upon Terms of greater Uncer-  
 tainty; And,
3. For a less Recompence; So, that  
 what is in one Case their *Complaint*, is  
 in *another* their *Choice*. For,

1. The

r. The Man who toils out his Life in worldly Occupations, is often more a Slave to them, than any Man needs be to the Business of Religion. He *hastes to rise up early, goes late to his Rest, and eats all the while the Bread of Carefulness*, for a small Subsistence, which shall preserve him from Contempt and Poverty, or raise him in the Esteem of his Friends and Neighbours.

The Accommodations in Life, which are purchased by Care and Diligence, stand the Possessors of them in a good Share of Pains and Labour before they can come at them; a large Proportion of the Time for enjoying them, is usually spent before their Designs are ripe, or the Success will answer. Nor is any Pursuit in Life ordinarily attainable, without a considerable Measure of Art or Industry employ'd upon it. Yet the Men who are esteem'd the wisest in their Generation, complain not of the *Means*, so long as they have their *End* in View, and can hope to come at it. They will deny themselves a good deal in *one* Point to gain *another*; and will not stick at

at *Difficulties*, if there be any Prospect of getting thro' them.

Now this is all, and often more than all, which Religion requires of us.

At our Entrance upon it, 'tis confess'd, it hath its Hardships; which yet will be so far reconciled by a little Use and Practice, that they will not long be felt. And the Ease which will arise from Habit and Custom, will in Time be pleasurable; and we shall know what there is in the *peaceable Fruits of Righteousness* to endear it to us.

Let us but be near as intent upon the Service of God as the *Voluptuary* is upon the Service of his *Lusts*, or the *Worldling* upon his *Profit*, or the *Man of Ambition* upon the Pride of Life; let us sacrifice but a small Part of that *present* Ease, to the Security of our future Interests, which *they* Sacrifice in much larger Proportions to their respective Pursuits; and it will prove the Sum and Substance of what is expected at our Hands. The rest we shall find done for us, and there will be no interfering Pretenders to contest the Prize with us. "Nor Death,  
" nor



“ nor Life, nor Angels, nor Principa-  
 “ lities, nor Powers, nor Things pre-  
 “ sent, nor Things to come, nor Height,  
 “ nor Depth, nor any other Creature,  
 “ shall be able then to separate us from  
 “ the Love of God, which is in *Jesus*  
 “ *Christ* our Lord.” The *Liking* to our  
 Duty, will grow upon us by the repeated  
*Use* of it; and we shall even be forced at  
 last to deny ourselves, whenever we would  
 depart from it. So that the Endeavour  
 which is apply’d in the Beginning of a  
 religious Course to conquer its *Diffi-*  
*culty*, will become in Time so natural  
 and easy to us, that it will proceed with  
 Delight and Pleasure. And then I am  
 sure there can be no just Complaint of  
 it. But,

2. *Secondly*, I observed yet farther, in  
 Abatement of the Objection hence ari-  
 sing, That Undertakings for *this World*,  
 are often form’d upon Terms of greater  
*Uncertainty*, as well as of greater *Expence*,  
 than those which respect our *future In-*  
*terests*.

Indeed we ordinarily sacrifice to Re-  
 ligion no *present* Good, which ought  
 not

not otherwise to be sacrificed, if there were no such Thing as a *future* Prospect. If God did really design for us no Reward beyond the present Life ; he would however, as a Governor, be no less concerned than he is, for the Interests of Virtue. It might become him indeed under that Capacity, not to bid us to our Loss, but to make some *present* Provision for any *present* Loss we should sustain by serving him.

But having now referred us to a *future* Compensation, he hath in *present* the less Need of observable and constant Interposals for this Purpose. Nor,

2. *Secondly*, Is the *Uncertainty* here so great and formidable, as some would too industriously represent it. For it is as sure a Consequence, as any which can be deduced from Reason ; that, if *God is, he is, or will be a Rewarder of such as diligently seek him.* And it is as sure a Principle, that *God is*, as any which is to be found amongst Things invisible, and not evident to Sense. So that the Recompence of Religion is indeed as *certain*, as any thing not evident to Sense can be.

But now in many Undertakings for *this* World, the Assurances of Success rise no higher than to mere *Probability*; sometimes it is not so much as *probable*; and yet a good deal is ventured even upon so remote a Prospect. Men will risque their Souls, and pawn their *eternal* Interest in diverse Examples; even with Injury to their Bodies, and without the least Addition procured in the last Result to that *temporal* Good, which they thought and hop'd to have serv'd by the desperate Adventure.

The Event of Things is indeed so casual and precarious, and unforeseen Contingencies have so large a Share in their Determination, that even reasonable Prospects and well-laid Designs, are seldom found to answer the Hope conceiv'd of them. Yet few or none are hence discouraged from renewing their Attempts, or from trying all Conclusions, rather than they will sit down content with Loss and Disappointment. If one and another do not succeed, they will make the Experiment of a third and fourth; and so without End or Respite,



spite, whilst Opportunities are open, or any favourable Occasion suits their Endeavours. Were a small Proportion of this Solitude translated to the Affairs of Religion; how smoothly would they succeed, and how glorious would the Issue prove!

If *Difficulties* do not presently give Way, yet were we as *stedfast*, as *immovable*, and as *abounding always in the Work of the Lord*, as we are in the Pursuits of our worldly Devices; they must and would yield to our repeated Labours. Nor can a Man on this Side the Grave suggest any Disappointment he has found in the Success of his Religious Cares. Nor is there any colourable Reason for a Suspicion, that he shall hereafter find it. So that in Truth there is nothing to be pleaded, for his *Zeal* to the *one*, and his *Coldness* to the *other* Pursuit; but that he has misplac'd his Affections, and so must plead *one* Error in Apology for *another*. For I observed,

3. *Thirdly*, and Finally, That the Man of this World, as he often takes *more Pains*, and upon Terms of greater Un-

*certainty* than the Man of Religion; so he always doth it for a more scanty *Recompence*. So cheaply will he devote his Service, to the Master he's most fond of; and insist upon Terms so high and so unreasonable, where he hath less Affection.

When a Man is once convinced, that there is a *Recompence* allotted to Virtue in another Life; he cannot suffer himself to doubt but that the God who hath it in his Disposal, will dispense it proportionably to his own Magnificence. And *Revelation* hath added yet farther Light to this *reasonable* Prospect.

But what is sought for here with the most eager Application, is seldom or never found to fill the Capacity, which seeks from thence its Entertainment. Its Value is a good deal anticipated by Expectation; much of it eat out beforehand, by the Time and Solitude, which are severally employ'd in preparing for it. And at last there is a certain Emptiness in worldly Good, which leaves behind it a Leanness upon the Soul, and in the Height of Enjoyment can furnish  
no

no solid Satisfaction. Therefore, upon the whole, to object against Religion, from any *Difficulties* attending it, is not to form our Complaint upon the Reason of Things; but upon our own misgoverned and misapplied Affections.

If there were really all the *Difficulty* in Virtue which the *softest* Mind can ascribe to it; and all the *Uncertainty* of its Recompence, which the most *sceptical* can suggest of it; yet the *Recompence* propounded is of such vast Importance; that *Difficulty* and *Uncertainty* would carry no Weight in the Scale against it. *Infinity* in the *Degree*, and *Eternity* in the *Duration* of it, are Circumstances, so preponderating, that no *Difficulty* which is not invincible, no *Uncertainty*, which leaves behind it any Glimpse of *Hope*, can have much Allowance made to it.

Wherefore, when it is considered that *Difficulties* and *Uncertainties*, far greater than any which can be here pretended, are daily undertook and broke thro' in the ordinary Tract of Life and Business; and yet that the *Recompence* in these Cases propounded, is in nothing com-



parable to the *Recompence* of Religion; what Apology will then be left us to excuse our Sloth in the Service of our Maker? What shall we offer to our righteous Judge, when he comes to compare our *Wisdom* and *Diligence* for *this* World, with our *Negligence* and *Folly* in our Managements for *another*? What, I ask, shall we answer to our God in Judgment, when he demands from us our Improvement of the Light afforded us? Of his *reveal'd Instructions* to us? Of the many favourable, tho' unheeded *Interposals* of his *Providence*, to save and rescue us, to awaken and admonish us, to stop us in the Career of our sinful Courses, or to encourage our Advances in all holy Obedience? Finally, of his *Spirit*, illuminating, preventing, exciting, quickening, and by all the various Methods of his Grace assisting us in the Discharge of our several Obligations? What Excuse, I ask, shall we find in the Day of Trial, for neglecting and perverting the manifold Gifts of God; for abusing the Light of *Nature* and *Revelation*; and for being deaf to the  
Calls

Calls of his *Providence* and of his *Spirit*? Helps, in themselves, abundantly *sufficient* for our Salvation; and only thro' *our Fault* and *Folly* made *ineffectual*!

Doubtless the Sting of the never-dying Worm will be pointed with a peculiar Sharpness, when we shall reflect in a Place of Torments, upon the Provisions made for keeping us out of it; and upon the Powers once lent us, tho' lent in vain, for securing our own Salvation.

But what would *then* aggravate the Horrors of our Condition, may *now* be applied to warn, and to secure us from them; to engage us in a serious Attendance upon the *One Thing needful*; and upon the *Means*, which lead most directly to that important *End*; above all, to take Heed, that no *Grace* of God be *in vain* dispensed to us; that no Talent be suffered to lie by us unimprov'd or useless; and that no Diligence on our Part be wanting, to *make* our *Calling and Election sure*.

Upon these *Conditions* the Grace of God, which is to *all sufficient*, will be to *us effectual*.

And now it only remains for the Conclusion of this whole Argment, that I deduce from it such Inferences, as the Text with the Occasion of it, will fairly warrant.

I. *First* then I observe from it, That *Grace* doth not extinguish *Nature*; but moves in Concurrence with it. *St. Paul*, 'tis evident, had his Struggle, which press'd him so hardly, that he *thrice besought the Lord, it might depart from him*. In answer to this Request, we find no farther Promises vouchsafed to him than what would leave him still in a State of *Conflict*, altho' within Reach of *Victory*.

1 Cor. x.  
13.

*St. Paul* himself had before assured these very *Corinthians*, that *God would not suffer them to be tempted above their Ability; but would with the Temptation also make a Way to escape, that they might be able to bear it*.

Now an *Ability to bear*, and to stand the Test is *one thing*; and an *Impossibility of being foil'd by it*, is *clearly another*. *Sufficient Grace* will answer the *former Purpose*; but *irresistible Grace* is requisite



quisite to the *latter*. *This* is no where *promised*; that is no where *refused*.

It is plain enough, that *St. Paul* had *sufficient* Grace in the Circumstance now before us; when yet he was apprehensive, that it would not prove *effectual*; and therefore desired, that the *Temptation* might be removed from him, lest he should be oppress'd by it.

He distinguished therefore plainly, between such Assistance as might *possibly* prove available, and such as would and *must inevitably* prove so. Now what makes in these Cases a Difference in the Event, must in all Reason be charged upon a different Disposition in the several *Receivers*, rather than upon any different Measures allotted to them by the *Giver*; who *gives to all Men liberally*, and would *have all to be saved*, and therefore cannot be imagined to with-hold from any *one* Man, what is necessary to save him.

But if *irresistible Grace* were necessary to Salvation, it would be no Man's Virtue to use it, nor any Man's Fault to miss of it; since if it be given him, he cannot but use it upon such a Supposal;

posal; and if it be with-held from him, 'tis in vain to make an Attempt without it. And I need not, I suppose, suggest to you, where such a Persuasion is likely to end, or how little the Interests of Virtue are consulted by it. But let God be true, and every Man a Liar; let God be justified in all his Dealings; and let Man take humbly to himself the Reproach of his own Demerits. Whenever he sins, he neglects the Gifts of God, which are *within* him, and *without* him; abundantly ministred to him, in the various Methods of *Nature* and of *Grace*. He neglects an Improvement of the Helps afforded him, which is the fatal Inlet to all his Miscarriages. The *Sufficiency* therefore is of God; but the *Efficacy* depends upon the Will of Man.

2. *Secondly*, We may hence observe the Use of Temptations; how they magnify the *Glories* of *Grace*, and commend the *Concurrence* of *human Endeavours*.

*My Strength is made perfect in Weakness*, (saith the Word of God in my Text.)

Jam. i. 12.  
3.

And St. James elsewhere hath pronounced a *Blessing* upon the Man, who endu-  
reth

*reth Temptation; and hath observed that the Trial of his Faith worketh Patience.*

The World, indeed, into which we are sent, seems intended for nothing so much, as for the Proof of our several Virtues; and the different Circumstances to which we are allotted in it, answer well to the Design, of trying our Strength, and our Fitness for all Encounters.

To see a weak Creature, surrounded with Difficulties and bravely pressing thro' them, is exemplary to Men, and a Spectacle worthy of God and of his holy Angels; who are represented as rejoicing in the Victory gain'd upon such a Struggle. But now the weaker the Creature is, and the stronger the Temptation which assaults him; so much more is the Provision magnified, which enables him to stand against it. On the other Hand, since his *own Concurrence* is necessary to the Success of the *Divine Assistance*; the Virtue and Vigour wherewith he concurs to it, are Articles in his Favour; the Use he makes of the Helps afforded him, signalizes the Wisdom of his Conduct, and commends the Exercise of his  
rational



rational Powers. So that the more Employment there is of this Kind found for him; the higher is his Praise, and the greater will be his *Recompence of Reward*. More particularly yet in the

3. *Third Place*, We may hence consider the Advantage of afflictive Providences; how they correct the Excessencies of human Frailty, and render us more *meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance with the Saints in Light*.

Whatever the Pressure was, which lay heavy upon our holy Apostle, the Intent of it was plainly this, that he might not *be exalted above Measure, thro' the Abundance of his Revelations*. Some Tendency therefore there was in his Mind to being so exalted, And the Method of Providence for preventing it was bowing down his Soul under the Weight of some sore Calamity.

Indeed each advantageous Circumstance of Life and Fortune, is in itself too apt to elate us, and to make us forget the Hand it is derived from. Nor are even *good Men* always exempt from some Share of this unhappy Disposition,

Is the World well inclined to favour and applaud them? Even here is a Snare, which is too apt to entangle them. They grow fond of the empty Honour; and remember not, that they have nothing but what they have received.

Be this or any thing else the Danger attending upon a smooth and easy Passage thro' Life; the Danger, whatever it be, may well be conceived removable upon a Change of Circumstance, and upon some Obstructions given to the Passage by Rubs and Difficulties.

The Minds of *good* Men will more especially return to their heavenly Byass, when the Allurements are withdrawn, which seduced them from it. And even *bad* Men, one would expect, should endeavour to provide themselves with a comfortable Retreat, when the *Tears*, or *Conjunctures* find them, *in which* they must say, *they have no Pleasure in them*. Nor are indeed the very best of Men without an Allay of Infirmities, which they would be much ashamed to carry with them into the *Marriage Chamber of the Lamb*.

The

The *Thorn in the Flesh*, grievous as it was to our Apostle, yet was considerably less hurtful, than those Swellings of the Spirit would have proved to him, which were designed to be cured by that wholesome Discipline: “For Pride is  
 “the Disparagement of many Virtues;  
 “as the brightest Ornament of Innocence is Humility.”

4. *Fourthly and Lastly*, We may hence observe, that when the Prayers of good Men, for the Removal of their several Pressures, are not answered in *Kind*, they are however answered in some *fit Equivalent*.

St. Paul besought the Lord that the Difficulty, which here assaulted him, might depart from him. This, we find, was thought improper to be granted him. But yet his *Prayer returned* not to him empty; he had an *Equivalent*, in a *Sufficiency of Grace* enabling him to bear and to get over it. And in any Warfare, 'tis better, we know, to be victorious, than to lie still. The unactive State indeed is *safest*; but the more dangerous is ever the more *glorious*. And when we do not court our Danger, but are plunged



plunged into it, by providential Junctures, the Providence of God is the more concerned to support us in the Struggle, and to crown our Endeavours with Success and Victory.

*In due Time we shall reap, if we faint not; if we are not impatient nor distrustful, nor too unresign'd in our Addresses to the Throne of Grace, there will with the Temptation be made a way to escape or bear it.*

Wherefore in all our Difficulties we should look up to God, and submit it to his Providence, whether we shall escape or bear them; humbly beseeching him, that if the bitter Cup may not pass from us without our drinking it, his Grace may be sufficient for us, and his Strength be perfected in our Weakness. Remembring always that *the Light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.*

*To which God of his infinite Mercy vouchsafe to lead us, thro' the Merits of Jesus Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate.*



## SERMON XVII.



2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

*But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid  
to them that are lost;*

*In whom the God of this World hath  
blinded the Minds of them, which  
believe not, lest the Light of the  
glorious Gospel of Christ, who is  
the Image of God, should shine  
unto them.*



T. Paul had here been put  
upon the uneasy Task of  
commending his Ministry to  
some, who had detracted  
from it; of asserting his own Sincerity  
in

in preaching the Gospel committed to him, and of suggesting the Efficacy and Power, wherewith it must have been attended, if the Lusts and Passions of those who received it from him, had not thrown in the fatal Obstacle to all his Endeavours. He declares for himself in the second Verse, that he had not handled the Word of God deceitfully, but had commended himself unto every Man's Conscience, as in the Sight of God, and mindful always of his omnipresent Majesty.

Wherefore, if after all this Care on his Part, the Gospel he preached was either not understood or not accepted by those it was addressed to, the Fault must needs have been *theirs*, not *his*; they must have been People abandon'd to their own Ruin and Destruction, Men blinded by their corrupt Affections, and desirous of continuing in Bondage to the God of this World; so that the Light of the glorious Gospel of *Christ*, which is such a perfect Representation of God's holy Will, so fitted to illuminate the Understandings and to gain upon the



Hearts of those it is reveal'd to, could not have a fair Access to them, nor consequently a suitable or sufficient Influence.

This is the Sum of our Apostle's Complaint. What was *personal* in it, I have only opened, to lead you into the *general* Observations arising from it; which are these two:

I. That the Gospel of *Christ*, as delivered by the Apostles, whether in Word or Writing, is sufficient to answer the Purposes, for which it was revealed.

II. Therefore, That the Miscarriage, where there is any, must be chargeable upon the perverse Dispositions of such as unduly receive it.

I. I begin with the former of these two Observations; *viz.* That the Gospel of *Christ*, as delivered by the Apostles, whether in Word or Writing, is sufficient to answer the Purposes for which it was revealed. Sufficient, I say, whether delivered in *Word* or *Writing*: For it is at least as easy upon the Foot of our natural and unassisted Powers, to deliver

deliver our Apprehensions of any thing in *Writing*, as it is in *Words*: *Writing* is indeed the surer and safer Way, less liable than the other to Error and Misconstruction; may have farther Degrees of Consideration bestow'd upon it; and if any thing be obscure or unascertained in it, the Person it is deliver'd to, may dwell upon it the longer, may turn it over and over in his own Thoughts, and may borrow the Sentiments of others concerning it. So that if the Apostles were really desirous of communicating to the World what they knew of the Gospel, or what they judged it fit that others should know of it; we cannot doubt but that the Means of doing this were as open to them in the Way of *Writing*, as of *Preaching*: Nay, in the *former* Way, they might speak more diffusively, and even after their Deaths to the Churches of *Christ*; whereas in the *latter* they are necessarily limited to Time, and Place, and Opportunity. It only then remains to be considered, what their *Intentions* in this Mat-

ter were; since of their *Abilities* in it there can be no just Question.

Now concerning their Intentions and the Execution of them you may hear their own Testimony: Thus then St. *Luke* acquaints his *Theophilus*, in the Preface to his Gospel, that it seemed good to the Evangelist, *having had perfect Knowledge of all Things from the very first, to write in order to the said Theophilus*, that he might know the Certainty of those Things wherein he had been instructed; which is a strong Intimation, that Writing, in the Judgment of that Evangelist, was a surer Way of conveying the Knowledge of the Gospel, than Speaking was. St. *John* hath told us in the Close of his Gospel the Design wherewith it was written, viz. That they to whom it was directed, might believe *Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, and that believing they might have Life thro' his Name*. St. *Paul* hath apprized us of the View wherewith the Writings of the Old Testament were indited, even for our Learning, that we thro' Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures might have Hope. In like Manner he acquaints

Luk. i. 3,  
4.

Joh. xx.  
31.

Rom. xv.  
4.



quaints the *Ephesians*, that by reading <sup>Eph. iii. 3, 4.</sup> what he had *written before in few Words*, they might understand his Knowledge in the *Mystery of Christ*. Thus also he intimates by Letter to the *Philippians*, that <sup>Phil. iii. 1.</sup> as it was not *grievous* to himself, so for them it was *safe*, that he should *write the same Things*. And in his second Epistle to *Timothy* he speaks of the <sup>2 Tim. iii. 15, 16, 17.</sup> Scriptures then extant, as *able to make one wise unto Salvation; as profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness*. And the very Design of committing them to Writing, was *That the Man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*. Finally, we have St. *Peter's* declared Resolution in his second Epistle, <sup>2 Pet. i. 12.</sup> that he would *not be negligent to put the Christians he wrote to in Remembrance of the Things* (pertaining unto Life and Godliness) *tho' they knew them before, and were already stablished in the Truth of the Christian Religion*. The Amount of these several Evidences is clear, I think, and strong, in favour of a written Revelation, of its Usefulness and Sufficiency;

ficiency. The Intent of those who were concerned in transmitting to us these Oracles of God, is hence apparent; they were written for our Instruction, to remind and ascertain us, to create in us a saving Faith, to perfect us, and thoroughly to furnish us unto all good Works. This was their avowed Design, and we have the Hands of their Writers for it; I have read to you the very Words of the Apostles and Evangelists, wherein they severally and expressly declare their Purpose. Whether they were, or were not mistaken in their Estimate of Things, and in the Fitness of the Means which they chose for the Accomplishment of this their Purpose, can be no Question with those who yet are most apt and ready to contradict us in our present Argument. They must acknowledge the inspired Pen-men to have been fit and competent Judges of the Sufficiency or Insufficiency of a standing Word of Prophecy, and of a written Revelation. And that they have declared for its Sufficiency, the Texts which have been cited, do strongly prove.

But

But whether, what the Apostles spoke by Word of Mouth to the Christians their Cotemporaries, or transmitted in Writing to succeeding Generations; whether the whole Scheme of the Gospel, when taken all together, be sufficient to answer the Purposes for which it was revealed, may still perhaps remain a Doubt with those, who are weak in the Faith, and raw in the Doctrine of God our Saviour.

These should therefore be exhorted to consider,

1. *First*, What is the declared Intention of the Gospel.

2. *Secondly*, What are the Means, whereby that Intention is consulted,

1. *First*, What is the declared Intention of the Gospel.

The Apostle, we may be sure, in acquainting us what it *was*, meant to inform us what it was *designed* to be; even *the Power of God unto Salvation*. Rom. i. 16.

Now if such a Thing as Salvation were at all attainable; common Sense would direct us, without other Instruction, to seek out the *good and acceptable and per-* Rom. xii. 2.



*fect Will of God* : Since it must certainly be within his Disposal ; and the Performance of his Will must be the nearest and shortest Way to it. Thus far then common Sense would easily carry any Man who would use it. But in the Quest of this Knowledge we have the Experience of many Ages, and of the wisest Men in them ; Men, whose natural Talents and acquired Improvements in all other Science have not been since exceeded ; we have, I say, their joint Experience to assure us, that *such Knowledge was too wonderful and excellent for them*, and that they could *not attain unto it*. Some splendid Things they said and did, in order to instruct Mankind in those important Lessons, of *living soberly, righteously, and godly*. But as Mankind, after the best Instructions will be frail and sinful, the Ministry of Reconciliation was utterly unknown to them ; the Encouragements to Holiness were dark and dubious ; depended upon Reasonings and Inferences, which few were able to deduce in a proper or a convincing Manner ; and when carried to their utmost Lengths, they

they fell very short of any such Assurance, as was likely to govern Practice. Meanwhile the whole System of their Religious Worship was entirely out of Course, misguided in its Object, corrupt in its Rituals, defective and unauthorized in every Part of it: So that however the Design of all Religions is perhaps the same in *Substance*, and meant to recommend their respective Votaries to the Favour of some superior Powers; yet this Design was no where answered to any tolerable Degree; where there was no Revelation to prescribe the Forms and Methods of pursuing it, and to ascertain the Recompence, when the Service should be well and honestly performed. I mean but to touch upon these Particulars, for the sake of those who may not have considered them. But I must have Leave to insist upon the Truth of Facts, that this was really the Case of Mankind, wherever destitute of a written Revelation; that they were bewilder'd and lost in a Maze of Ignorance and Error; that they greedily catch'd at every delusive Light, and false

false Appearance which seem'd to promise them better Information, and hence were led yet farther from the Way of Truth; so that they sinned yet more and more; grew more and more Strangers to the Knowledge of their Duty, and to the Means of Acceptance; became more and more *alienated from the Life of God, thro' the Ignorance which was in them because of the Blindness of their Hearts.* And with little or no Disposition to Repentance for all their Abominations, they were utterly uninstructed in the Methods of suing out their Pardon; or of approaching, by proper Steps, to the Throne of Grace: This gave Rise to various Superstitions, and discovered at once the Presumption and the Poverty of human Invention. In each of these Articles the Deficiency was great and evident, and the *Means* were apparently insufficient to the *End* they professed to aim at it.

The Gospel hath the same Design in view, and would lead us to Happiness by teaching us to please the great Object of our Worship. And the Sufficiency



ency of the *Means* which are propounded by it, for answering its declared Intention, is the

2. *Second* Particular to be now discussed. Their Sufficiency will easily appear by naming them. And they are briefly these which follow.

1. The clearing up and improving what was deficient in the Scheme of moral Duty, as known or knowable by natural Light.

2. Prescribing a Directory for our Religious Worship.

3. Ensuring the Acceptance of our penitential Sorrow.

4. Ascertaining the Motives to Practice, and fixing the Sanctions of the Law prescribed by it.

1. The clearing up, and improving what was deficient in the Scheme of moral Duty; as known or knowable by natural Light. This may seem to have been less necessary, because it might well be expected that the common Reason of Mankind would lead them far in it, without other Help; and it appears upon Trial that greater Advances were made

made in the Knowledge of moral, than of any other Duty. But yet Room was here plainly left for many Additions, and for many Improvements. Indeed with the Help of great Talents natural and acquired, and of a Language fitted to convey the Writer's Meaning with the best Advantage, many Things were finely represented, and some were well and gallantly performed, in the Heathen World: But without any one of these Advantages to set off the Christian Scheme, how glorious is it in its native Lustre! How well and powerfully doth it commend itself to every pure and disentangled Conscience, by the intrinsic Weight and Excellence of its Precepts!

Immoral *Practices* are not only there forbidden, and their contrary *Virtues* pre-emptorily commanded; but the most distant *Avenues* and Inlets to Wickedness are guarded; the Thoughts are under Controul and Regulation, and the *Heart*, as well as the *Hand*, is directed to be kept with all Diligence.

Amidst

Amidst all the laboured Eloquence of the most knowing Sages in the *Gentile* World, there is nothing to be named in the Comparison with that short but comprehensive, plain but instructive Discourse of our Saviour's from the Mount; wherein the Defects of all former Morality are so handsomly touch'd, and so fully supply'd, that a Man may form his whole moral Conduct upon the Plan of the Principles which are there advanced, and may form it with more Advantage, than upon all the Volumes of human Learning without it. 'Tis true that human Learning grafted upon the Christian Scheme, and taking its Rise from it, hath mended its own Appearance, with such Helps in its Favour. So that even the Morality taught by the Heathen Instructors *since* the Publication of the Gospel, hath been purer and nobler, than it was *before* such Publication; and Men have been brought to discern the Enormity of divers Practices, which lay heretofore under little or no Discountenance.

But



But at last the best and brightest Lessons of Practice, which were given by the great Masters of human Learning, were more admired for the Beauty of the Dress, than for the Usefulness of the Precept; as in all the Ornaments of Discourse and Language, they exceedingly abounded, and knew how to set off their Subject with every Advantage, wherewith Art and Oratory could cloath it. But some Subjects of near and deep Concern to the Purity of Practice were left untouch'd by them; nor could they well or safely touch upon them, whilst even the Ceremonies of their Religious Worship, as well as the common Usages of Life, favour'd the Vices which Philosophy and good Sense might otherwise have corrected: Even those Parts of Morality, which were adorned and recommended by them, were scattered up and down in numerous Volumes, and fitted rather for the Entertainment of the Polite and Curious; than calculated for the Service of plain and common Understandings:

I have

I have pointed these Circumstances to your Notice, because, I persuade myself, you will be enabled by them to go before me in estimating the Advantages of the Christian Revelation; even upon a Topic, wherein human Reason might be expected, if any where, to perform its Part without farther Help.

The Preceptive Part of the Gospel, you will easily observe, is suited to the meanest Apprehension; nor yet will the most elevated be able to rise above it. Nor have you far to go for the Knowledge of your Duty; a few Pages in a Book of no mighty Compass, have comprised the Sum of it. Nor is any Vice indulged, which is either injurious to the Dignity of human Nature, or to the Advantages of human Society. Nor is any Virtue omitted, which can either raise and support the Honour of the *one*, or promote and cherish the Interests of the *other*. Nor is there here any Room for suspecting a Design upon you from the Wisdom of Words, or the Power of human Eloquence. The Precept is addressed to you plainly and directly;

i

*I say*

*I say unto you, Do this, or that; and so the Prohibition, Thou shalt not do this, or that. Here is no Art nor Ornament, no soft Introduction, nor smooth Harangue; but the Law-giver exerts his Authority in Words sufficiently expressive of his Meaning; and when ye know his Will, ye are happy, if ye do it; and it is at your Peril, if ye neglect or transgress it.*

Thus I have in short deduced to you the *Sufficiency* of the Gospel-Revelation, for clearing up, and improving what was deficient in the Scheme of moral Duty, as known or knowable by natural Light.

2. A Second Instance of its Insufficiency in the Means propounded by it, for leading us to Happiness, is prescribing a Directory for our Religious Worship.

The Failure here was almost universal in the Heathen Formularies; and scarce any thing was thence performed in Religious Worship, but what, instead of diminishing, added to the Sin of the misguided Votary.

Besides the confessed Duty of expressing the Sense we have of our Dependence  
on



on a superior Power, in the solemn Offices of Praise and Thanksgiving; there seems to have been a pretty general Concurrence, in all the civilized Nations we read of, for cloathing these Offices with certain Forms and Usages, which, without any general Reason founded in the Nature of the Things themselves, have crept, I know not how, into general Practice; yet, I think, we may fairly guess, that the Derivation of Mankind from the one common Stock, was in Part the Original of this common Concurrence; or else it must be judged, that the same Propensities of human Nature contributed to lead Mankind into the same Practices.

I shall specify to you the chief of these; and shew you, how the Corruption which had prevailed in each of them, found, or might have found, a Cure, in the Reformation taught us by the Gospel.

I. *First* then I observe upon the Gross of the Case, that Mankind was ever very much addicted to a sensible and ritual Worship; and when left to themselves

to invent the particular Rites and Ceremonies, wherewith they should offer it, they presently run aground upon the most vile and abject Superstitions. Hence, as soon as the original Traditions delivered to the first Founders of our Race were lost or forgotten, other Usages were substituted in the Room of them, indulging still the same Propensity, tho' with less Innocence and Purity, and at last with abominable Filth and Pollution. So that in the very Height of human Knowledge and Learning, Religion was at its lowest Ebb, and sunk into the thickest Dregs of Barbarism and Bigottry; enough, one would think, to cast down for ever after, the Imaginations of human Pride, and to convince us, that our unassisted Reason is by no Means fitted to prescribe the Methods of Divine Worship! Our Saviour visited us in this lamentable Condition, *feeling thus after God if haply we might find him* : The ritual Bent, as founded in the original Mechanism of our Being, he did not quite discourage; but hath left us still and enjoined us the Use of  
certain

certain Ceremonies, leading to a spiritual Purpose, and precluding us from an Indulgence to our own Devices.

Thus whilst he hath told us that *God is a Spirit*, and that his *Worship* must be paid him in *Spirit and in Truth*; he hath mercifully considered *whereof we are made*, and permitted us to glorify our *Maker in our Spirits and Bodies* too.

In Pursuance of this general Propensity to a sensible and ritual Worship, I observe,

2. *Secondly*, That all the Gentile Addresses to the Object of their Worship, proceeded upon great Indulgences to Imagination and Fancy; and accordingly Representatives were every where found out to receive the Homage of these abject Supplicants; which usually center'd in the Idol, and look'd no farther. Hence from the more glorious Parts of the Creation, which this Practice began with, religious Honours gradually descended upon Stocks and Stones, the Fruits of the Earth, the Beasts of the Field, the Fowls of the Air, and the Fishes of the Sea; nor was any Creature



so vile or so contemptible, to which Man, who was made to be its Master, did not bow down and worship it. These indeed were Usages, which it could no way consist with the Majesty of the supreme Being to bear with or encourage. But yet, so far as they were either Innocent or pitiable in their Rise, and owed their Original to the Over-balance of Sense and Fancy in the Composition of our Being, the Gospel hath provided an Help and Remedy even for this Inconvenience. And thus, as the visible Glory in the Temple of *Solomon* was designed for a Preservative to the *Jews* against the *Sabaism* of their eastern Neighbourts; which consisted in the Worship of Sun, Mooh, and Stars, those visible Glories of the Heavens; so the human Nature of *Christ*, united, as now it is, to the Word and Wisdom of the Father, is the authorized Object of Christian Worship; and thus our Imagination may well and innocently assist our Addresses to the Throne of Grace. Again;

3. Thirdly

3. *Thirdly*, The Worship of the supreme Being in and thro' a Mediator hath a very general Countenance from antient Practice. But then the Mediators of the Heathen World were unauthorized and fictitious, the Creatures of human Invention, or else Rivals of the blessed and only Potentate, who strove to alienate Mankind from the Knowledge of his Will, and to derive upon themselves those Honours, which are only due to his peerless Majesty. Great and lamentable was their Success in these devilish Endeavours, till the Son of God undertook to set us right in this Part of our Worship, and to bring it back within the Channel from whence it had departed. By him we are clearly taught, and our Practice may safely proceed upon this Acknowledgment, that as *there is one God*, so there is *one Mediator between God and Men, even the Man Christ Jesus*. And we are not only permitted, but commanded to pray unto the Father in his Name,

4. *Fourthly*, and Finally; The Worship of God by material Sacrifices, as it

had a very early Original, so met with a very general and spreading Concurrence. To such of them as were intended for the Expiation of Sin, I shall have Occasion of speaking upon my next Particular, when I come to consider, how the Gospel hath ensured the Acceptance of our penitential Sorrow. My present Observation is only meant of such as were Eucharistical, and offered in Acknowledgment of Benefits receiv'd from Heaven.

Here then the Christian Scheme hath warranted the Substance which before was unwarranted; only it hath changed the Form of the Practice, and added fresh Reasons and Motives to it. Now the greatest Blessings which the Mercies of God did ever dispense to his sinful Creatures, are solemnly commemorated in the great representative Sacrifice of our Worship: Nor are the daily Bounties of his Providence neglected or forgotten in it.

So that, we see, in all the Parts of our Service, which needed a Directory to regulate or reform them, we have one prescribed



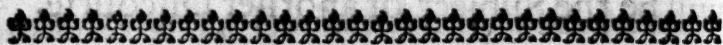
prescribed to us. And thus far the Sufficiency of the Gospel, for the Purposes it aimed at, is, I hope, confirmed to you.

Other and farther Means for the Accomplishment of its wise Designs have been mention'd to you; but as the Time will not now permit me to go thro' my intended Argument, what remains of it will be the Subject of another Discourse.





## SERMON XVIII.



2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

*But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid  
to them that are lost;*

*In whom the God of this World hath  
blinded the Minds of them, which  
believe not, lest the Light of the  
glorious Gospel of Christ, who is  
the Image of God, should shine  
unto them.*



WO general Observations have  
been already mentioned, as  
arising from these Words.

I. That the Gospel of *Christ*, as deli-  
vered

vered by the Apostles, whether in Word or Writing, is sufficient to answer the Purposes, for which it was revealed.

II. Therefore, That the Miscarriage, where there is any, must be chargeable upon the perverse Dispositions of such as unduly receive it.

Here then having shew'd you, that Writing was at least as fit and as successful a Method for the Conveyance of Knowledge as any verbal Discourse, I proceeded to consider,

1. *First*, What is the declared Intention of the Gospel.

2. *Secondly*, What are the Means, whereby that Intention is consulted.

Now the avowed Design of the Gospel is leading us to Happiness, by teaching us to please the great Object of our Worship. Thus it was meant to be the *Power of God unto Salvation*. And as in pursuing this Intention, all Experience proves to us, that Mankind was lost and bewildered, and needed a Guide to lead and to direct them; the Gospel hath furnished whatever of that Kind  
was



was wanting, provided us with ample and sufficient Means for helping us out of all our Difficulties, and for carrying on its Design to its desired Conclusion.

The Means to this End were named to you, and specified in the following Order, *viz.*

1. The clearing up and improving what was deficient in the Scheme of moral Duty, as known or knowable by natural Light.

2. Prescribing a Directory for our Religious Worship; in which special Provision was made, and Helps and Remedies were found out, for the prevailing Corruptions, which had foiled the Purity of Religious Duties.

Thus far we were advanced in my former Discourse.

But as other and farther Means, for the Accomplishment of the same good End, were mentioned to you; proceed we now to a more particular Consideration of them. These were,

3. Ensuring the Acceptance of our penitential Sorrow.

4. Ascer-

4. Ascertaining the Motives to Practice, and fixing the Sanctions of the Law prescribed by the Gospel.

How far the Repentance of sinful Creatures might have prevailed upon the Mercies of God for Pardon and Forgiveness, without any Atonement made to his Justice, or any Provision for the Honour of his Laws, is a Question of great Nicety, which it is not needful to decide upon this Occasion. But it is evident, that the general Sense of Mankind did rather favour the negative Resolution; and all apprehended that somewhat or other would be demanded by Justice in the Way of Expiation. And indeed the Reasons of Government, and thence of Justice, are as eternal and unchangeable, as the Relations of Things are one to another: And the Impunity of Sin would manifestly infringe them. What a fearful looking for of Judgment must the Sinner then have, should the Reasons of Government and Justice plead all against him; were there no Advocate to appear for him, to weaken the Force, nor to blunt the Edge  
of

of those Laws, against which he hath offended? If his penitential Sorrow were to be accepted, instead of his Obedience, the Law would have no Security when left so unguarded. The Law-giver would appear too little concerned for it, if he were so easily contented; and every Malefactor might hope for his Favour, if this were singly the avowed Condition of it. 'Something more than this, it was universally believed, would be exacted by the Divine Justice: But what this should be, where, or whence it should be furnished, was the confounding Difficulty, which the natural Man could never get over. The thousands of Rams, or the ten thousands of Rivers of Oil, could not relieve the Sinner's Despondency, even under an instituted Worship, and a revealed Religion. For, as the Author to the *Hebrews* hath well observed, in the Reason and Nature of Things it was *impossible, that the Blood of Bulls and Goats should take away Sins.* They might serve as Figures to usher in a better Sacrifice, and as such might enter very fitly into the Formularies of Worship;

Heb. x. iv.



Worship; but none could think the Virtue of them sufficient for so great a Purpose, as the Satisfaction of Justice, or the Expiation of Guilt. Wherefore

The Acceptance of their penitential Sorrow must needs have been a Point of great Difficulty and Doubt, to such as were unacquainted with the OEconomy of the Gospel; whatever they might hope, they could have no tolerable Assurance of it upon the Foot of those Principles, which sway'd their Practice. But now upon the Publication of the Gospel, there is no Room left for any farther Scruple; we have now an undoubted *Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our Sins.* So that we may be secure our Services will not be lost to us, which we shall offer to God with humble Minds, and penitential Tears. At the same Time, the Claim of a Sacrifice so valuable, must certainly convince us, that the Honour of God's Laws is exceedingly dear to him; consequently that the Tenor of our Gospel-Obligations is indispensably bound upon  
us;

us; and if we do not come up to them, that we are lost without Redemption, because no Redemption but *that* is left to us.

But then on the other Hand, if we come within the Conditions of a general Pardon, which is thence proclaimed to the Penitent and Contrite; the Issue is ascertained, and we are sure of our Title to it. So that we have hence all the Encouragement to Obedience which can be given it, by an expresse Stipulation, that it will be accepted; and all the Discouragement from Sin, which it can possibly receive from such an authentic Experiment of its Odiousness in the Sight of God. This fully answers all the Reasons and Demands of Punitive Justice, whose Retrospects are chiefly founded in the View of obtaining sufficient Reverence and Security to its Laws; and when that Point is once gained, there is room for Mercy: But if that Point were not gained, and if no Provision were made for the Honour of God's Appointments, the Sinner would be hard put to it, for any rational Ground of Hope; and if there were no rational Ground of Hope

Hope for any past Offences, there would be very little Encouragement to any future Obedience.

So that by ensuring in this manner the Acceptance of our penitential Sorrow, the Gospel hath supplied a very great Defect, and hath let us into the Methods of pleasing our Maker, upon his own Conditions.

4. *Fourthly and Finally*, By ascertaining the Motives to our Practice, and by fixing the Sanctions of the Law prescribed by it, all is done which was fit to be done with free Agents, for securing Obedience to it.

A Law the Gentiles had, which was *written in their Hearts*, and bound upon them by the Powers of natural Conscience; but those Powers were so weak, and the Characters it was written in so hardly legible, that it scarce amounted to the *Authority*, and, be sure, had not the *Efficacy*, of a Law. The Law-giver himself was so little known to them, that his Will must needs have been less so: And it is the due Notification of the Law-giver's Will, which properly makes



makes a Law. But now tho' the Reason of Mankind, if exerted, as it should have been, might have found out the Will of God in the great Lessons of moral Duty; yet in Fact, their knowledge tended but little farther than to the Fitness or Unfitness of certain Actions, which comes a good deal short of an Authority binding to Conscience, and enforcing Obedience; and as to the Rewards and Punishments of another World, which are the great and declared Sanctions of the Gospel, tho' they were in the *Mouths* of most Men before its Publication, yet it cannot be imagined, that they should have entered very deep into their *Hearts*, considering the Foundations upon which their Belief was built. They who reasoned themselves into that Persuasion, could be but few; nor was such their Persuasion strong enough for the Support of Practice. They who took it from them, could not be so sure; and the Generality borrow'd it from the broken Remains and Fragments of a Tradition, whose Original was quite forgotten; so that their Views in this Mat-

ter must needs have been exceedingly dark and dubious, and very unlikely to bear up against the ordinary Powers of Temptation. Nor could the strictest Reasoning whereof they were Masters, infer the Certainty of any thing more or farther, than that some Distinction or other would be made in a future State between the Righteous and Wicked. The Wrath of God was not at that Time so revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, as to affect them with any deep Concern about it. The Eternity of the Recompence respectively intended for Vice or Virtue must have been pure Conjecture. And yet any Measure of Duration short of Eternity apparently carries but little Weight in it.

What Light is struck into this Question by the Gospel; what clear Declarations are made in it of Life and Immortality; what Instances and Evidences are there exhibited of God's Love to Man, of his Aversion to Sin, of his immutable Holiness, of his inexorable Justice, and of his Interest in all our

Concernments; I hope I need not particularly deduce to you. The whole Tenor of it proclaims to us the penal Consequences of unrepented Sin, as well as the Recompences of a sincere Obedience. Nor are we left to spin out this Conclusion from deep or artful Reasonings; but as plainly as Words can convey the Notice of any Thing to human Understanding, we have clear and express Declarations from the God of Truth, that the *Dead are blessed which die in the Lord, that the Righteous shall go into Life eternal, and shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.* On the other Hand; that such as *obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord, and from the Glory of his Power.* These several Denunciations are plain and peremptory, frequently inculcated and strongly pressed. So that the Law we live under is as well secured and guarded, as the strongest Motives addressed to the Hopes and Fears of reasonable and free Creatures could secure and guard it.

That



That the Recompences propounded by it are distant and invisible, is the Circumstance which leaves us in Possession of our Liberty. So far is it from a just Objection to the Influence they may claim of us. For if Heaven and Hell were open to our View, and present before us, there would be no Room for free Choice; that which now distinguishes the Wisdom and Firmness of our Virtue, is the Resistance it makes to present Impressions, from a Regard to reasonable, tho' distant Prospects. It would be no Proof nor Evidence of our Wisdom or Firmness, not to run into a Fire which we should see burning before us; or to prefer an infinitely greater Good which should offer itself to our present Embraces, before a less. This, I say, would be no Test at all to our Virtue; which therefore is put upon one more proper, with fit Motives to *incline* our Choice, tho' with none to *force* it.

But how these Motives, which are so fitted to gain upon reasonable Creatures, come to fail of their Influence;

and how those Means of Grace which in themselves are so sufficient for all the Purposes they were design'd to answer, come to prove in any Instance ineffectual;

II. My *second* Observation from the Text hath given an Account; by charging the Miscarriage, where there is any, upon the perverse Dispositions of such as unduly receive the Gospel, *in whom the God of this World* (according to our Apostle's Language) *hath blinded the Minds of them who believe not; so that the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, and hath brought into the World the fairest Transcript of his Father's Will, doth not shine unto them.*

Here a two-fold Account is given of our Barrenness and Unprofitableness under the Means of Improvement; which the Apostle hath charged,

1. *First*, Upon a Spirit of Infidelity.
2. *Secondly*, Upon our Attachment to worldly Views and Interests. By the one or by the other, or perhaps by both together,

together, our *Minds are so blinded, that the Light of the Glorious Gospel of Christ doth not shine unto us.*

1. *First* then, if the Gospel, tho' in it self sufficient, be not in every Instance efficacious, the Miscarriage is charged by our Apostle upon a Spirit of Infidelity; in which there are various Degrees, all tending to withhold, or weaken the Influences of Religion.

For Example, there is a cold and formal Assent of the Mind to the Truths of the Gospel, taken, it may be, in the Gross all together upon Trust, and in mere Compliance with the Fashion of the Times we live in; now it is no Wonder, that such a Belief as this should be lifeless and languid, and unable to make any Man a Believer unto Righteousness; when he hardly knows what, or why he believes, it may very well be doubted whether he believes or no. But a Persuasion so little considered, and so ill supported, will never have Warmth nor Strength enough to produce any Fruits of Holiness. The Neglects of this kind are widely spread thro'



the Bulk of Mankind. They hear the great and important Notices of Religion, as they would any mere Amusements; they suffer them not to sink into their Hearts; they enquire not much about them, whether they be true or false, rational or incredible; they are content to lodge them upon the Surface of their Minds, but to admit them no farther, nor to make them familiar Guests. Now, I say, it is utterly unimaginable that any Man should bear up against the Difficulties of Practice, with the Help of such feeble and crude Inducements; Inducements, whose Importance is never weighed, nor the Tenour of them understood, nor the Credibility of them in any Manner considered or discussed. When all the Assurances which can be derived from the most vigorous and rational Persuasion are found little enough to engage the Heart in the Interests of Religion; how is it to be expected that Virtue should maintain its Ground, if the Motives which should support it are defeated of their Influence?

These

These Motives are the Threats and Promises of the Gospel, with the whole Oeconomy of divine Grace, as it is there represented and displayed in its several Dispensations: When these are well understood, and thoroughly digested in the Mind of a true Believer, who hath examined the *Reasons of the Hope which is in him*, there is all Appearance that he must be thence persuaded to *deny Ungodliness and unworldly Lusts*. But in the cold and formal Way of receiving them, without any Attention or any Examination, no Effect from them can reasonably be expected.

Only here we cannot but complain, that any rational Creature should be so lost to all Sense of his own Interests and Concernments, as to hear of these Matters with so little Regard to them: That he should be told of Life and Immortality depending upon his present Conduct, that he should seem to believe it, that he should observe the general Sense of Mankind giving into it; and yet never examine the Grounds of it, never enter into the Particulars of a

Scheme so nearly concerning him, never look any farther into it, than as it will often fall into his Way and he cannot avoid it; I say, that he should be thus indifferent and neuter to such important Considerations, is a Degree of Indolence and Insensibility, which in any Case but this would forfeit all Title to common Sense and Understanding.

But besides this cold and careless and barren Belief, which is next in Degree to no Belief at all, there is a more direct and thoughtful Infidelity; which criticizes much and deeply upon the Reasons of Religion, and gives them up in the Conclusion as untenable and uncertain: For absolutely false the most seasoned Infidel will hardly pronounce or pretend to prove them. Let us argue with him then upon his supposed Uncertainty; a Thing which we do by no Means grant to him, and we think can evince the contrary by Proofs demonstrative in their Kind, and perfectly suited to the Nature of the Question. But, I say, upon his much contended for Supposal of Uncertainty; what,



what, in the Name of Truth and Prudence, is the proper Consequence; and which of the two is the surer and safer Side of the Question? That which provides for Life and Immortality if it be any where attainable; or that which utterly abandons the Hope of it, and neglects all Care of such great Salvation? Till he hath prov'd the Thing impossible, he hath advanced but little towards proving the Reasonableness of indulging his beloved Lusts. And except all the Motives of Religion can be made to appear exceedingly improbable, he can do nothing towards a Defence of his gross Neglects: Because there is so much in the one Scale, and so little in the other. The Consequences of his providing or not providing for Eternity, are so vast, and so over-proportioned to any thing which can be propounded from the other Side of the Question; in short, there is so much depending upon a Gospel Holiness; and so small is the Overplus of worldly Good, which can be got by making bold with it; and even in that small Overplus, with great Uncertainties

ties of succeeding, he must run such terrible Hazards to gain a Thing of Nought; that one would think no Man in his Senses, should engage with such Odds against him, or push a desperate Adventure, with the strongest Motives of Reason, Interest, and Duty, directly thwarting and forbidding him.

Even in his worldly Pursuits he must be content to proceed upon much Uncertainty; and yet his Success in them can promise him nothing comparable with the Promises made to Godliness. But could the Success of any considerable Project in Life, be made as sure to the Adventurer, as the Recompence of Virtue is or may be; there is not a Man upon Earth, who would not strive and struggle to come into it. So wise and provident are we in this our Generation; so negligent and imprudent, indeed so utterly destitute of common Sense and Forecast, in our Provisions for Eternity!

For this strange Inconsistency of Conduct, the Apostle hath accounted under my

*2. Second*

2. *Second* Particular of the Topic now before us; and charged it upon our Attachment to worldly Views and Interests. So that notwithstanding our Belief of the Gospel, the God of this World intercepts its Light, and precludes its practical Influence upon our Hearts.

Sensible and present Good plays all its Charms and Powers before us, dazzles our Eyes with the Pomp and Glitter of the Life which now is, makes us impatient of its Absence, and unconcern'd for Events which are distant and invisible. But if Reason were to govern us (and it would be a strange Declaration from reasonable Creatures, that Reason should not govern them) the Importance and Duration of Events which are distant and invisible, would be set in the Scale, to weigh against such as are sensible and present. And if the Importance of the former be great beyond all Conception, and their Duration endless, this should mightily enhance their Esteem with us; as if the latter be of small Account in the Comparison, their Continuance short and momentary, and  
impos-



impossible to be ensured to us; this on the other hand should considerably sink the Value of them. Now this is plainly and truly the Case before us.

Our great Reverſion is confeſſedly at *ſome*, tho' we know not *what*, Diſtance from us. Mean while our Eyes cannot ſee, nor our Ears hear, neither can it enter into our Hearts to conceive it. But then the God of Truth hath interpoſed his Word to aſſure us of his Favour, if we will come within the Terms of it, and hath exhibited ſuch amazing Inſtances of his Love to Men, thro' all the Wonders of Creation, Providence and Redemption, that we may ſafely commit our Souls to his keeping; and entruſt him with the Manner and Meaſure of the Recompence he deſigns for us.

Some Inter-eſt, 'tis agreed, we have here depending, which will have its Hold upon us; and will ſeldom be a Sufferer for our Regards to Conſcience. Sometimes perhaps it may, in a few rare Emergencies. When this is the Caſe, the Recompence, we may be ſure, will  
riſe

rise with the Service, and no *Labour*, nor Degree of Labour, shall *be in vain in the Lord*. This adjusts the Proportion of the Help to the Hindrance; and commensurates the Size of the Recompence to the Height of the Temptation.

If the Motives of the Gospel fail any where of their proper Influence, the Apostle hath told us what manner of Persons they only fail with; even the Sons of Perdition, and them who are lost. If Reason, or Interest, or a Sense of Duty could bind them; they have *there* a full Concurrence of all those Motives to engage them.

But if they are bent upon Ruine, and finally resolved upon their own Destruction; the God of this World is ever ready to forward such baneful Work, to continue them in the chosen Blindness of their Eyes or Hearts; and either way, or both ways to draw them off from the Knowledge and Practice of their Duty.

Whether they are Infidels in Speculation, or in Practice, or (as usually they are

are) in both, the same Conclusion follows; the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, as to them, is darkened; the Means of Grace are defeated; Access to Glory is precluded; and Hell and Destruction open wide their Mouths for them.

That this may in no Part of it be our Lot, let us pray to God,

*That he would shew unto them that be in Error, the Light of his Truth, to the Intent that they may return into the Way of Righteousness: And grant unto all them who are admitted into the Fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those Things which are contrary to their Profession, and follow all such Things as are agreeable to the same, thro' the same Jesus Christ our Lord.*

S E R M O N





## SERMON XIX.

2 PET. iii. 9.

*The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise (as some Men count Slackness) but is Long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.*



W O Sorts of People we may presume Satisfaction design'd to from these Words. One was, of those, who being tired out with the Hardships to which their

their Religion exposed them, thought their Deliverance a great while in coming, and thereupon begun to slacken their Confidence in the Promises of God: The other, of such, as professedly derided all Expectations of that Nature; who, as they look'd for nothing beyond the present Scene, lived very agreeably to such Apprehensions, and *walked after their own Lusts*: And, not content with practising for themselves upon their own Libertine Principles, they endeavour'd, it seems, to diffuse the Poyson of their Example, and to laugh others also out of their Religion. For *where*, say they, *is the Promise of his Coming* we are so often told of? To us it should seem, that Things even proceed as they have done from the Beginning, and that the World goes on as it ever did, without Change or Interruption. But to the Mistakes of both, to the Despondency of the one, and to the importunate Clamours of the other, the Apostle directs his Answer in my Text, and in the Verses adjoining to it. To the atheistical Scoffer, who insisted so avowedly

edly upon the Continuance of all Things, as they were from the Beginning of the Creation, he suggests the notorious Truth of the contrary ; that the World had already undergone a remarkable Change in the great Deluge of Waters : And from thence takes Occasion to hint at the Credibility of its future Destruction by Fire. *This (says he) they are willingly ignorant of, that by the Word of God the Heavens were of old, and the Earth standing out of the Water, and in the Water. Whereby the World that then was, being overflow'd with Water perished. But the Heavens and the Earth, which are now, by the same Word are kept in Store, reserved unto Fire against the Day of Judgment, and Perdition of ungodly Men. So that it was very far from being true, that God had never interposed for the Punishment of Wickedness ; and therefore very far from being credible, that he would never so interpose again.*

And for the Satisfaction of such as were rather tempted thro' frailty, than perversely inclined, to distrust the Promise of their Lord's Coming, the Apo-



He gives some Reason, why the Length of Time should be no Objection, nor any Shock to their Belief of it. Since how long soever they might represent it to themselves, it bore no Proportion to Eternity: Now he upon whom they depended, was an eternal Being; in whose Account therefore one Day and a thousand Years were Periods alike significant.

And in my Text he suggests the Long-suffering of God, as a further Reason for the Delay of his Vengeance.

*The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise (as some men count slackness;) but is Long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.*

So that the Long-suffering of God is the Argument of my Text; and shall accordingly be so of the ensuing Discourse.

In speaking therefore to this Subject, I shall

I. *First*, Endeavour to give some Account, and to assign some Reasons of  
God's

God's Forbearance to Sinners. From whence it will follow in the

II. *Second Place*, That his Long-suffering is no Reason to believe he will never take Vengeance; and therefore

III. *Thirdly*, Can be no just Encouragement to their Continuance in Sin. Quite contrary, I shall observe in the

IV. *Last Place*, That it is a very engaging Motive to them to forsake it.

I. *First*, I am to give some Account, and to assign some Reasons of God's Forbearance to Sinners. Whereupon I observe in the

i. *First Place*, that if either the Promises of God seem slack in the Performance, or if his Threats appear slow in the Execution, yet it should be remember'd, that the Delay bears no Proportion either to the Eternity of *his own*, or to the future Continuance of *our* Being. This is the Apostle's Argument in the Verse next immediately preceding my Text. *Beloved* (saith he) *be not ignorant of this one Thing, that one Day with the Lord is as a thousand Years, and a*  
H h 2 *thousand*

*thousand Years as one Day.* The different Measures of Time, by which we account the Duration of Things, and the Succession of one Event to another, are really of no Consideration in the Eye of an *infinite eternal Being*; but the least and the greatest Periods are to him alike. When we indeed look back upon the Years which were before us, and consider the many Transactions, and great Revolutions which have pass'd therein; the Length of Time, and the Multitude of Events overcharge our narrow Capacities, so that we consider them with Surprise and Admiration: Yet this arises not at last from the Nature of the Thing, but from the Confinedness and Limitation of our Apprehensions; as unable to reflect upon such a Series of Time, and such a Complication of Circumstances without Dizziness and Confusion. But now to the comprehensive Understanding of God, all *these* Things lye naked and open, clear and distinct; so that with one single Act of his capacious Mind, he takes in the whole Creation, and all the numberless



berless Occurrences and Events thereof. Wherefore a thousand Years appear not so much to him as a Day does to us; because he views the Transactions of a thousand Years, within a smaller Compass of Time, and with infinitely greater Clearness and Discernment, than we can those of a single Day or of a Moment in it. There is plainly then no Reason, why he should hasten the Day of Vengeance, merely because the World is of such a Standing, and so it may seem a great while in coming to our limited and narrow Prospects. Were our Capacities narrower than they are, we should think his Vengeance much slower than now we think it; were our Minds and Powers improv'd into a larger Compass, we should take in more easily a wider Prospect, and our Views would reach into a further Extent of Time. It is further also to be consider'd in the

2. *Second Place*, that God never intended this World for the Place of our final Recompence, and therefore is the less concern'd to interpose with Frequen-

cy or Constancy for the immediate Punishment of the Sinner's Misbehaviour; he may suffer him to oppress for a while his more righteous Neighbour, and to triumph for a Season over the Ruines of injur'd Innocence. Being sure that Impenitence cannot finally escape him, he is the less hasty in pursuing it with immediate Vengeance. And tho' it may seem for the present grievous to the Sufferers, to lye at the *cruel* Mercy of prosperous Wickedness; yet they may be assured that he who is the Helper of the Friendless, will in his own due Time take the Matter into his Hand, which is committed to him. And then they will have as little Reason to complain, as their Adversaries to insult upon God's Forbearance.

The one will be assign'd to such an Increase of Happiness and Glory, as will amply recompence them for all their Sorrows; and if the other persevere in their Contempt of God's Long-suffering, they also will then be convinc'd, that the Abuse of his Patience proves Fuel to the

the Fire, and increases at last the Fierceness of his Wrath.

3. *Thirdly*, We may presume it design'd in much Mercy to Sinners, that he does not catch at every Advantage, nor seize the Forfeiture, as soon as it is due in Justice; that he gives them Time to consider their Provocations, and does not call them reeking from their Vices, to come before his Presence, and give up their Accounts. Nay even to the Righteous themselves we may presume the Forbearance of God intended in Mercy: Since there is no Man who doth good, and sinneth not; *even the Righteous are not clean in his Sight, and the Angels themselves he charges with Folly.* So that if God were extreme to mark what is done amiss, and *every Sin* were *presently* to be attended with its due Demerits, the World must have been crush'd soon after it came out of its Maker's Hands; the Beauty and Wisdom of God's several Dispensations must have been lost and frustrated, and none of us could have been here, to praise his Goodness in the Land of the Living. If then the Sins of



Men be *now* any Reasons for God's destroying the World; wherever there have been Men, there have always been these Reasons for the Destruction of it. But how much or how long he shall bear with the Perverseness of his Creatures, is not for *us* to prescribe either to his Wisdom or Goodness. We affront the one, when we adventure to *direct* it; and we injure the other, when we presume to *stint* it. Many Reasons he may have for his *Forbearance*, which are yet lock'd up among the secret Counsels of his Providence. And till we view the whole Chain of that wise Contrivance, and see all the Links thereof together, and their several Dependences one upon another; we must needs be unfit to judge of their Connexion, to unravel all their Intricacies, and mutual Implications, or to censure the Fitness of his Contrivances and Dealings. Yet thus much farther we may

*Lastly*, Be allowed to offer in Defence of his seeming Slackness concerning his Threats and Promises; that it is designed to lead us to Repentance. St. Peter hath

hath told us in the ninth Verse of the Chapter just cited from him, *that God is Long-suffering to us-wards, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* Time starts many Accidents, which have a Chance at least for a due Operation. When *some* Methods have in vain been tried, *others*, at length have been found to answer. There are certain *Seasons* of addressing successfully to the Hearts of Men; when their Passions will suffer their Reason to be spoke with, and even sometimes procure it a favourable Hearing. There are critical Junctures in *Religion*, as well as in *Life and Fortune*; and in these, a *weaker* Motive meeting with due Improvement, shall have a *more persuasive* and *more successful* Influence, than at *other Times* a *stronger*. And if we believe the Spirit of God concern'd in the charitable Work of helping forwards our Salvation, these we may well conceive are his favourable Moments. But should these be anticipated by a speedy Dispatch of Vengeance, many a Soul might have been lost, which now we trust is safe  
and

and secure in *Abraham's Bosom*. Thus we account, as (in another Part of this Chapter) we are directed, that *the Long-suffering of God is Salvation*. It often proves so in the Event, and is commonly intended for that very Purpose.

I have now endeavour'd (according to my first Proposal) to give some Account, and to assign some Reasons of God's Forbearance to Sinners. From whence I observe in the

II. *Second Place*, That the Long-suffering of God is no Reason to believe he will never take Vengeance. The Reasons which *account* for his Forbearance, do alone destroy that Inference. Yet because the Sinner is always willing to flatter himself with Hope of Impunity, I shall more professedly set my self under this Head, to shew that there is no Reason, from the Delay of his Vengeance, to conclude that he will never execute it. For,

I. *First*, If the End of the World, and the Dissolution of all Things about us, be the Vengeance expected, it was no way



way *proper* to raise so vast a Fabric, except it had been design'd for some Ages Continuance. It might seem to favour of Weakness and Levity, (which *surely* are far from the Perfections of God's excellent Nature) to destroy the Work of his Hands almost as soon as it came out of them. Whatever may be *pretended*, it can never be *proved*, that this System of Things, which we call the visible World, has yet exceeded the Age of 6000 Years; and *that's* no such disproportionate Series of Time, for a Structure of this Size and Magnitude. Now, tho' we see no such present Decays in Nature, as do certainly forebode its approaching Dissolution; yet we know not what Changes a little Time may bring forth. We have been prepared by an inspired Writer, to expect that the *Day of the Lord should come as a Thief in the Night*, suddenly and unexpectedly; so that we may cease to wonder, if its Advances be less observable. But indeed till we are better acquainted with the Orbs above us; and know what it is which keeps them in order, and governs their Motions,

tions; and preserves them from Confusion, and falling foul upon one another (which for any sure Account of Things deducible from natural Causes may be only the immediate Hand and good Pleasure of their Maker) we can form no certain Dependences upon this World's Continuance for a Day to come; because it may be dash'd in Pieces by so many various Instruments of Divine Providence, or set on Fire by the nearer Approaches of to-morrow's Sun.

2. But *Secondly*, If God's Forbearance in the Punishment of *particular Mens Sins*, be the Circumstance which founds a Security that he will never punish them *at all*; the Reasons of this have already in Part been given; and *now* I add, that it would be very inconvenient upon many Accounts, if this were otherwise. For if Sin could never be committed without immediate Vengeance closely pursuing it, there could be no proper Foundation of Reward to our Obedience. Since it is the *Temptation to Vice*, which manifests the *Strength and Firmness of our Virtue*; when, notwithstanding the powerful

powerful Allurements, and the attractive Pleasures of this World, we chuse to sacrifice them all to the Prospect of a distant and unseen Reward. There could hardly be conceived any Liberty in that Refusal, which should be directed by a Foresight of certain and imminent Destruction upon our Compliance. Again it should be considered,

3. *Thirdly*, That whatever Continuance the World may seem made for, yet the Lives of *particular* Men are short and uncertain ; so that in the Course of Nature, it cannot be long e'er the Sinner will be consigned over to the Reward of his Deeds. And as to the little Incidents of Fortune, and Turns of Life in the Interim, they are of too small Importance in the Account of infinite Wisdom, to be the Badges of Distinction between its Friends and Enemies. So that 'tis no just Conclusion, there is indeed no tolerable Ground of Hope, because the Wicked are not always cut off in the Midst of their Days, that therefore God will never attend to, nor requite their Sins. He has (even for the present)

so



so much Regard to the Differences of Mens Behaviour, as to have contrived the *general* Course of Things, for the Advantage of Virtue, and for the Discouragement of Sin. Nay, he often makes his Power yet *further* known, by particular Interposals in *signal* Cases. And even the utmost Lengths of his Forbearance can be proved to extend no further, than to the present State. So that it can only conclude him, what he would always be represented, a merciful and long-suffering God, *slow to Anger, and of great Kindness*, when ever his Kindness is consistent with any Regard to Law or Order. But there is no imaginable Colour for depending upon an everlasting Impunity, from the sole Delay of a few Years; because a few Years bear no Proportion to the Eternity which is to follow them.

Quite contrary to this, I observe in the

4. *Fourth* Place, That the Conclusion most properly resulting from God's *present* Forbearance, is, that he will punish *hereafter* in another State. When all his  
Methods

Methods have in vain been tried, for the Reformation of Sinners, it is reasonable, I say, to think, that Vengeance will at last succeed in the room of abused Long-suffering : And that such Vengeance too will be differently executed, proportionably to the different Degrees of such Abuse. That the World is govern'd by a wise and holy Being, is apparent from manifold Considerations. So that if Sin does not always meet *here* with the Treatment due to it, the proper Inference is, that the Wages of it will *hereafter* be distributed. This Conclusion is founded upon a clear and evident Principle, the Holiness and Justice of God. But when we start Objections upon his present Dealings, we dispute in the dark; and it is never likely we should receive Satisfaction, without taking into our Account the whole Chain of his Administrations. Suppose but a Life beyond the present, and it is easy to foresee a possible Solution to all our Doubts, which can arise upon the Scene before us. For then it will be natural to think that whatever befalls us *here*,

must receive its Character of *good* or *bad*, of *beneficial* or *pernicious*, from its Relation to our *future* State, and from its Tendency to serve or disserve us in our *greatest* Interests.

Thus I have endeavour'd to shew under my Second General, that from the *Delay* of God's Vengeance, there is no Reason to believe he will *never* inflict it. And therefore I infer more briefly under my

III. *Third*, That the Delay of his Vengeance can be no just Reason for our Continuance in Sin.

For we have seen, that it does not lessen our Danger, it gives no Colour to the Notion, that God is an unconcerned Spectator of Wickedness; and except it did this, except it amounted to a Proof that the World is governed by Chance, and that there is no superior Providence to inspect our Actions, it cannot lessen the Folly of risking so great a Stake as we have there depending. If he punishes *hereafter*; all agree, he will do it in a Manner and Measure far beyond any thing we can *here* conceive.



ceive. But now his *present Forbearance* makes Proof, that he will *hereafter* pursue the Wicked with his Vengeance; so that to take Occasion hence for continuing in Sin, is to take Occasion from the *greatest Danger*, for being most *fearless* and *desperate* under the Approaches of it. Yet after all, his *present Forbearance*, is not so constant or observable, as to found any just Dependence, that Sin shall always even *here* escape with Impunity. The contrary to this is rather true; for Wickedness seldom goes clear off the Stage without due Correction. Let its Contrivances be never so well formed, there is usually something to disappoint them, and to bring on a Punishment suitable to its Demerits. And if a wise and holy Being governs the World, *Security* is the most likely thing imaginable to defeat itself, and to interest his peculiar Care against it; lest it should grow at any Time into an allow'd Observation, that the Way to be prosperous and happy here is to insult the Authority of him, who has our Happiness and Prosperity in his Disposal. And

in Fact he has quite otherwise contrived it. For tho' it may not in all Cases suit the Methods of his Government, to appear in the Punishment of Sin, by visible and present Interposals; yet generally speaking, a Man must live innocently, in order to live happily. So that the Forbearance of God, in not pursuing Sin with immediate and constant Vengeance, cannot, even upon present Prospects, recommend to us the Safety or the Interest of continuing in it. Because the general Course of Things is so ordered, as to make it an imprudent Choice even for the present; and though thro' unavoidable Contingences, this Rule may sometimes encounter Exceptions, yet very often he interposes with his Power, to sustain his own Authority, and to preserve it from the Insults of those, who might otherwise forget that there is a Judge in the Earth. But after all, it must at last be owned, that the Life to come is the only sure Answer to all Exceptions. For hence it is, that there can be no assignable Juncture of Circumstances, wherein Disobedience to the Laws of our Maker

Maker can reconcile itself with any Principles of common Prudence. If our Misdeeds escape his *present* Vengeance (which yet is always very hazardous and uncertain,) that very Escape invincibly proves that they cannot avoid his *future*. For a wise and holy Governour *will* certainly punish, either *here* or *hereafter*, those who do not qualify themselves for his *Mercy*. So that Continuance in Sin is very far from being justified, by the *Forbearance* of God. But I observe,

IV. *Lastly*, That his Long-suffering is much rather an Argument to us to forsake it; and to proceed henceforwards in all holy Obedience.

It is so in Point of *Gratitude*. Because we have seen that it is an Effect of his *Mercy*. If he pleased, he could strike the Sinner *dead* in the midst of his desperate Adventure, and consign him over to his final Recompence, without allowing him the Opportunities of Repentance or Reflection. But since he chuses to proceed with us by milder Methods, to *attempt* our Cure and our Re-



covery, by softening Medicines, by various Arts of Wisdom and Grace; it will surely become us, to hearken to his favourable Calls, and to make the proper Use of his merciful *Forbearance*; which is to allow his Goodness the Influence he designed it, of *leading us to Repentance*, and so securing our Salvation.

But if the Motives of *Gratitude* fail of persuading us, we should at least consider that our *Interest* is very deeply concern'd in this Matter.

For it is a very great Aggravation of our Offence, to pervert the Designs of Providence, and to turn the *Means of Grace* into *Occasions of Sin*.

That the *Long-suffering* of God may not appear *profusely* bestowed without *Design*, as well as without *Effect*; it will prove one Day an heavy Article in *some Mens* Account, and *condemn* those, who would not be *saved* by it. It will admit no Medium; but where *Salvation* is *not* the Consequence, *Destruction* will be. For every Man's *Improvements* will be expected to rise in Proportion to his Advantages.

vantages. And every Man's *Punishment* will doubtless increase, in Proportion to the *Opportunities* he has neglected, and to the *Means of Grace* he has defeated. So then, if the Forbearance of God has any Tendency to reform us; if it furnishes any Persuatives to our Duty; or any Proofs of an Account to be given hereafter; it is so far an Help to the Practice of Virtue, and strengthens the Motives to our Obedience: Wherefore to neglect or slight it, to defeat it of its due Operation; much *more* to make it an Instrument of Sin, and an Encouragement to our continuing in a State of Disobedience, must needs enflame the Account of our Guilt, and increase the Horrors of our final Condemnation. If, upon the whole, a Sense of the Divine Bounty, and of Gratitude to the most indulgent Master, cannot move us; yet let a Care of our own Interests and the Fear of enflaming his Wrath against us, prevail to persuade us, that the *Mer-ies* of God may not be succeeded by his *Judgments*, nor his Forbearance end in

a Consequence so unnatural as that of our greater Dampnation.

Rather by a prudential and timely Caution, let us consider how much we have deserved, and how little we yet have suffered; and how much the sorer Punishment must therefore await us, if we despise the Riches of his Goodness and Forbearance and Long-suffering; as not knowing, nor allowing, that the Goodness of God should lead us to Repentance.

To whom be Glory and Dominion now and ever.



SERMON





# SERMON XX.

Preach'd on *Whit-sunday*.



MATTH. xii. 31, 32.

*Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men; but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men.*

*And whosoever speaketh a Word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, neither in the World to come.*

THE



THE History of these Words, and the Occasion which introduc'd them, will contribute much to let us into their Meaning. At the twenty second Verse of this Chapter, we are told, that our Saviour had healed one possessed of a Devil. But when the Pharisees heard it, the Construction they made of it was, *This Fellow doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils*, ver. 24. In Return to which our blessed Lord sets himself to confute in the first Place their malicious and base Suggestion, and to shew the Unlikelihood of any such unlawful Commerce between himself and *Satan*, and next to censure, as it deserved, so foul a Scandal; and to warn its Authors of the Danger they would incur by spreading it.

The Point of Reason, and the little Likelihood there could be of his working his Miracles by any Concert with the Powers of Darknes, he argues with them from the twenty fifth Verse down

to

to my Text; in which he proves, from known and receiv'd Maxims, that such a Correspondence as was imputed to him, was the most absurd and groundless Asperſion, which could have been invented; that *Satan* would never impower *him*, or any one else, to act against the Interest of his own Kingdom; and 'twas the Destruction of *that* which our Saviour aim'd at in all his Miracles; that this Accusation was in particular the more hard upon *him*, and the more malicious in *them* to charge him with it, in regard, they had those among themselves, who pretended to the same Power of casting out Devils, and were known as such by the Name of *Exorcists*, who yet were never suspected of such unlawful Dealings. *If I by Beelzebub cast out Devils, by whom do your Children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your Judges.* And if not by *him*, then (as he goes on) most certainly by a Power stronger than his, which he is no way able to resist.

Thus far he *argues* the Case with them; and then proceeds to *censure* the Treatment he met with from them. As to  
I other



other Sins and Blasphemies they might very truly account them, as they were in themselves, upon a sincere and hearty Repentance pardonable. And as to any personal Affronts they might offer to *himself*, which reflected not upon his *Mission*, and considered him only as a private *Person*; these he could also easily excuse; and allow much to their Frailty, Prejudice, and Error. But when they proceeded so far in their Malice and Rage against him, as to revile the *Authority* whereby he acted, and so to preclude and obviate the only Means of their own Conviction; this was a Case quite desperate and hopeless; it was utterly *improbable* that Men of this Mind, should ever repent or ever change it; and therefore utterly *impossible* they should be ever pardoned, either in this World or in the other.

*In this World or in the other*, are Words which must refer to one or both of these Opinions, then current among those whom our Lord address'd to; the first of which was, that every true *Israelite* was to be interested, and have a Part in the

Age of the *Messias*; called as this is, μέλλοντι αἰώνι, *the World to come*. The other; that some Sins were pardonable in the next Life, which in this were irremissible. Now our Saviour, without either allowing or disapproving the Truth of these Opinions, gives them here to understand; that whatever Hope there might be of their Part in the Age of the *Messias*, would upon this Occasion stand them in no Stead at all, himself being the *Messias*, and so already come: Or if there should be, as they seem'd to think, any Place for Pardon in the Life to come, of Sins, which in this could have no Forgiveness; yet this Sin against the Holy Ghost was none of those Sins which could so be pardoned, since neither here nor hereafter, neither in this World nor in the other would it be forgiven. *The Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men*; as in the former Verse of my Text; or, *Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, nor in the World to come*; as the latter Part of my Text expresses it.

Having

Having thus far opened my Way to what I design from these Words;

I shall now proceed to a farther Enquiry,

I. What this Sin against the Holy Ghost is; and wherein consists its formal and proper Nature.

II. In what Sense we are to judge it unpardonable, and upon what Accounts it is so.

III. Whether there be now any Case, which is parallel to this of the Pharisees in sinning thus against the Holy Ghost; and what such Case or Cases may be.

IV. And, *Lastly*, I shall subjoin an Inference or two from the foregoing Discourse.

I. *First* I am to enquire what this Sin against the Holy Ghost is; and wherein consists its formal and proper Nature.

To this Enquiry the present Season does the rather incline me; in regard it will be found that the Sin we are now considering, offends more peculiarly against the Miracle of this Day; as the  
Miracle



Miracle of this Day in sending the promised Comforter was the last and finishing Provision made by God, for gaining Men over to the Interest of the Gospel.

It would be Labour lost, and indeed an Abuse of your Time and Patience, to rehearse to you the Diversities of Opinion amongst learned Men, concerning a Point as clear as many others, which yet have been less disputed.

The History of it has in Part already described it to you. For it was upon Occasion of the Pharisees imputing a Miracle of our Saviour's to an unlawful Commerce with unclean Spirits, that he warn'd them against this dangerous and fatal Sin. He told them this (as St. Mark records) *Because they said, he had an unclean Spirit.* Mark iii. 30.

He bid them therefore beware of making too near Approaches towards a Sin, whose Consequences would prove so irretrievable and pernicious. So that in thus reproaching the Power whereby he acted, they came very near, at least, to this great unpardonable Transgression; and

and therefore, tho' the Spirit was not yet given in so full a Measure, as was thereafter intended; nor the last Resort as yet made use of, for the Conversion of Sinners, and the Conviction of Unbelievers; yet much had already been done towards these great Ends; and they, who now reviled these Means of Grace, and their own Salvation, went far towards baulking any other Efforts which should be made use of to gain them; wherefore it was very fit and pertinent to remind them *now* of their Danger, and of the Speed wherewith they were hastening to their own irretrievable Destruction. There yet indeed remain'd to these very Men, who thus had affronted our Saviour's Mission and Authority, *The Sign of the Prophet Jonas*; that is, the Death and Resurrection of *Christ*, to persuade them; as well as the Testimony of those greater Works which his Disciples were to perform in the Power of that Spirit intended for them upon the Day of *Pentecost*: But then there was great Danger of those, who had so maliciously affronted the Spirit of Truth manifesting  
itself

itself in our Saviour's Miracles; great Danger, I say, there was, that these Men would persist in their Obstinacy, and go on to blaspheme against the *most flagrant* Evidence. And if, when God had applied the *last and utmost* Means for their Recovery, they would still go on to baffle and defeat them; if, as now they imputed our Saviour's Miracle in this particular Instance, to the Help of unclean Spirits, and afterwards that of this Day to the Effect of new Wine, so they should persist in misconstruing and misapplying the *last and utmost* Means of Salvation, then would they incur this irremissible Guilt; which therefore our Saviour here very charitably warns them of in its first Approaches. So that from hence we may at last collect what is the formal and proper Nature of this heinous Sin; "Which consists in a  
" malicious Opposition to the Spirit of  
" Truth; evidencing itself in Miracles,  
" and applying the most powerful Means  
" to gain us." Now to hold out in such a Case, against the most cogent Persuatives; and impute them all to Juggle and  
Imposture,



Imposture, is to defeat the only Means of our Recovery, and so must render our Condition incurable and hopeless. Which leads me to my

II. *Second Enquiry*; In what Sense we are to judge this Sin unpardonable, and upon what Accounts it is so. Here to say (as some have done) that this is a Sin which cannot be pardoned without a particular Repentance for it, would I think be too jejune and soft a Comment upon so severe a Commination. For this does not enough distinguish the Guilt of it, from that of any other wilful or heinous Sin; each of which will certainly require, as well as this, a particular Repentance.

But since the Gospel represents all Sins to be pardonable upon a sincere and hearty Repentance; if any one be excepted from the Pardon, it must arise from hence, that it will not submit to the Repentance.

Now of this Sin in particular it is at least extremely improbable, as well from the Nature of the Thing, as from the  
just

just Judgment of God, that it should ever be cancell'd, by Remorse or Amendment. For,

1. *First*, The Dispositions which lead to it, are always such, as promise small Hope of Reformation. Pride and Warmth, added to other Vices, strengthen the Interest of Sin, and join Hand in Hand to prevent the Sinner's Conversion. Were Want of Evidence the true Reason why Men hold out against Conviction; some Increase of that, or some Change of the Light it stands in, might be expected to produce advantageous Consequences. But a sturdy Opposition to the Truth, join'd with Rage and Malice against its Author, is a Difficulty too great to be master'd by any thing less than Almighty Power. And could we suppose (which there is no Colour for supposing) that *Almighty* Power would interest itself in a Case so abandon'd and deplorable, it must indeed exert its *Almightiness*, to save Men against their Wills; vicious Passions long indulg'd, would make head against any Efforts which should leave our Nature its proper Liberty of chu-

sing. Pride would be loth to acknowledge its Error, and Prejudice be unwilling to quit its Possession, where there is no Cordial Love of Truth or of Virtue, to remove such strong and forcible Impediments. So that amidst very great Indispositions to Amendment, here is no one Circumstance, which can seem to promise it, or be likely to extricate a Man out of so many Difficulties: What then can be expected in a Case so desperate, but that he should e'en go on, to oppose and to blaspheme, till he be convinced and confounded together; and choak'd with the Evidence which he would not swallow? This is the Danger of a resolved Opposition to the Spirit of Truth; and there needs not here the Supposal of any other Reprobation, than what the Sinner in this Case passes upon his own Head. For by rejecting the Counsel of God against himself; and by defeating those Means of Grace, which were design'd for leading him to Glory; he has baffled his only Remedy, and so is lost beyond all Hope of Recovery. And this indeed is the

2. Second



2. *Second* Consideration, which much heightens the Guilt, and consequently aggravates the extreme Danger of his Condition; that he offends against the last and most powerful Means made use of to gain him. What would have gain'd upon those, over whom our Saviour's Miracles, and those of his Apostles, had no Influence, it would be very hard to say. What would have convinced those Men, who could impute the *Conquest* of Satan to a *Concert* with him; and the Gift of Tongues to the Power of Wine, it is impossible for us to conjecture. But since these were the last Resorts of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, to gain upon a rebellious and sinful Generation, we may fairly presume, they were fittest for the Purpose, and in themselves most apt to produce the intended Consequence. What therefore defeated *these*, would in all likelihood have defeated the Force of any *other* Medicines. If the Testimony of the Spirit be rejected, discovering itself in various Signs and Wonders, and confirming the Gospel with all the needful and proper Vouchers; where is the

Proof superior to this; or where the Argument more able to support its own Conclusion? So that if this, I say, be rejected, there remain no further Means of Salvation: These are the last and utmost Efforts of the Spirit to convince and to reclaim us; and being such, we may be sure they are in themselves sufficient to answer the Ends they were made for, and it must be our Perverseness and Folly if they are at last defeated. Herein therefore doth consist the peculiar Danger of baulking them, that they leave behind them no further Resource, nor any more effectual Remedy than themselves to heal or help us. For,

3. *Thirdly*, What Assistances might be expected from above, are supposed in this Case to have been already offered, and already frustrated; the formal Reason which denominates the Sin unpardonable, consisting in this, That it offends against the last and utmost Means of Grace and Salvation. So that neither from the Nature of the Thing, nor from the Grace of God, can one Argument be form'd, which may minister  
any

any Ground of Hope, in so bad a Case. If Repentance be the Gift of God, and none can come to him, but such as he draws with his softening Invitations, the Criminal here has forfeited all Pretensions to so great a Favour. He has well deserved to be a living Monument of his Maker's Vengeance and Dereliction; as having despised the Riches of his Forbearance and Long-suffering, and flouted at the Offers of Forgiveness and Mercy. So that without an overbearing Measure of heavenly Succour, such as neither Reason nor Revelation furnish any Hope of, the Man has sinned away his Title to the Divine Protection, and can never escape after the *Neglect of so great Salvation*. What the Wisdom and Goodness of God have afforded, as Means *sufficient* to save him; what in fact have carried many to *Abraham's Bosom*; what have already been recommended with all the Force and Evidence, they will ever have to recommend them; these his Perverseness and Disobedience have already defeated of their just Weight and Influence: God has menaced his Sin with



Mark iii.  
29.

Desertion, and with the *Hardness of an impenitent Heart*; the Sin itself is of such a Nature, as forebodes a desperate Obstinacy, rather than any Approaches towards a penitential Remorse; so that with such a Complication of deadly Symptoms, he may well be said to be, what St. *Mark* more softly pronounces him, in Danger, (*extreme Danger*) of eternal Damnation.

Thus is this Sin, pronounced unpardonable, in regard Repentance is so hardly here supposable: Neither the Nature of the Thing, nor the Grace of God, furnishing the least Hope of it. Since this is therefore a Case so full of Horror and Danger; let us proceed to our

III. *Third Enquiry*; Whether there be now any Case parallel to this of the *Pharisees*, in sinning thus against the Holy Ghost; and what such Case, or Cases may be. In answer to which,

I observe, that, as the proper Nature and Guilt of this Sin consist in a malicious Opposition to the Spirit of Truth, evidencing itself in Miracles, and applying

plying the most powerful Means to gain us; a Guilt *may* be contracted, to parallel to this, and coming up so nearly with the *formal* Reasons of it, that it will be hard to discern much Difference between them.

Miracles indeed are not now wrought in Proof of the Gospel; which is the only Distinction between that of the *Pharisees* and some modern Cases.

But as a credible Account of them may be ridiculed and insulted, and the Argument they furnish, be burlesqu'd and banter'd; here is, I say, very little Difference either in the Nature or the Consequences of their respective Demerits.

So that there is at least a very near Affinity between the peculiar Sin against the Holy Ghost, and diverse Cases, which come too frequently upon the present Scene. Such as,

1. *First*, A perverse and obstinate Unbelief after due Means of Conviction, which is a Case of this Kind and Nature. When instead of that Spirit of Meekness, which Truth has always a Right to be

receiv'd with, the Spirit of Pride and the Love of Vice introduce a Maze of Errors, and harden their Followers in the Defence and Propagation of them. For this is a Temper which makes evermore a sturdy Opposition to the enlightning Influences of the Blessed Spirit; and baffles effectually his kindest Endeavours to convince them. Our Saviour very truly judg'd upon those desperate Infidels, who refused in his Time their Ear to *Moses and the Prophets*, that they would not be *persuaded tho' one rose from the Dead*. For where a *Competency* proves in any Case insufficient, an Abundance is seldom found to be of any great Significancy. Wherefore if *now* the stated Means of Conviction prove too weak to gain us; Miracles, in all Likelihood, would be lost upon us. But whether they would or no, they are least of all deserv'd by those bold and insolent Complainants, who pretend Want of Evidence under the clearest Light, and expect the Power of God should hold itself in Readiness to wait their Orders. Let them however be intreated to remember, that  
they



they are sinning all this while against their only Remedy; and that if this finally fails them they are undone for ever. But,

2. *Secondly*, Not those only, who would argue themselves or others out of their Faith, make near Approaches to this irremissible Sin; but they also come in for a large Portion of its Guilt, who are continually scoffing at Religion, and abusively sporting with sacred Matters. It is hardly possible to reach such fluttering Creature's Understanding. Reason and Argument are lost upon them; serious Persuasives can have no Influence; when instead of a serious Attention, they are heard with Laughter, and rejected with Scorn and Mockery. So that here is no Expectation of Success from any outward Means. And except the Spirit of God should forcibly change so light a Disposition, even *his* Suggestions, tho' so tempting in themselves, and so engaging, will hardly have Audience in Minds of so odd a Cast. Now this is to defeat after the most preposterous Manner, whatever can be applied to  
their

their Use and Benefit. For surely the Motives of Religion will be confessed by any considerate *Unbeliever*, to deserve more Regard than this amounts to. It were best at least for them to be civil, for Fear they should prove mistaken in the Conclusion. Mean while it were worth their most serious Care, to examine these Matters with Accuracy and Diligence; and to consider well how unbecoming it is to treat them with Insolence and Scorn; how unbecoming, I say, the Character of Gentlemen, as well as of Christians, to handle rudely and savagely those sacred Subjects, which all but themselves acknowledge so deep a Concern for. Again,

3. *Thirdly*, To sin against Conscience, avowedly interposing, and remonstrating upon our Practice, must likewise be judg'd to partake of this crying Guilt. For a well-govern'd Conscience is the Voice of that Blessed Spirit, witnessing with our Spirits, and warning us of our Danger, when we are venturing upon the Violation of our Duty. So that to venture notwithstanding, is

to defeat his preventive Influences, to set at nought all his Counsel, and to lose the great Preservative of our Innocence and Virtue. It makes such a dreadful Waste upon our Principles, as very much impairs our Health, and endangers our Recovery. For one Act of deliberate Wickedness is commonly found to succeed another. We seldom stop at the first Transgression. But when once we have opened the Flood-gate, a Deluge flows in, and the Waters of Bitterness overwhelm our Souls. Our vicious Passions are flesh'd with the Criminal Indulgence; the Restraints are weakened, which should have guarded our Virtue; and the Spirit quench'd, which was its best Security.

Now if a single Instance of offending against Conscience, contracts a Guilt thus crying and thus dangerous; then it is

4. More hazardous far, as well as a nearer Approach to the unpardonable Sin, to *persist* in a vicious Course after all the Means which can be offer'd to reclaim us. This indeed has a very large Share in the Reasons of that irremissible



missible Guilt: For the Spirit of God does always long struggle with Men, before it suffers them to arrive at such a daring Pitch of Disobedience. Yet he will not always continue to strive with them. If he sees them obstinately bent upon Ruin, and pertinaciously devoted to the Ways of Sin; he will desist at last from such a fruitless Contest, and will give them up to the Desires of their carnal Minds. And when once they come to be insensible and brawny, to have lost all Sense of Sin and of Danger; acting thus, I say, without Check or Controul, they go down Hill apace; and 'tis not to be expected they should slacken their Course, till they have reach'd the Bottom.

These are (all of them) Cases, which bear somewhat of Resemblance to the great unpardonable Sin; inasmuch as they all have more or less Tendency to defeat the last and most powerful Means of Grace and Salvation. Yet I say not of any of them, that they do strictly constitute that peculiar Sin, which my Text so absolutely pronounces irremissible.

sible. For that indeed bore a Relation so peculiar to the Age of Miracles, that it cannot in Strictness make a Precedent for any other.

IV. Wherefore by Way of Inference from what has been deliver'd upon the foregoing Argument; I observe,

1. *First*, That no one need here entertain any melancholy Scruples, or mis-giving Apprehensions, as if he had *un-awares* contracted this enormous Guilt. It may pass, I think, for a Rule in the Case before us, that they who are *most inclined to contract* it, are ever *least forward to suspect* it. The timorous, on the contrary, who seem *most* solicitous about it, have ever indeed *least* Reason to fear it; to be sure are in no Danger from it, while they have at Heart a Reverence for their Maker's Will, and pay a sincere Obedience to all his Commandments; while they continue in the Belief and Profession of the Christian Faith; and feel no settled Disposition to change it, for Heathenism or Atheism. Were they as free from all others, as we  
may

may safely pronounce them from this Transgression, they might look up to God with all the Confidence of Sons who had executed to a Tittle their Father's Orders. But since this is not here the Privilege of our imperfect State, they may still have Recourse to the Spirit of Adoption, and thro' *Christ* expect the Recompence of their honest Endeavours.

2. *Secondly*, I would hence infer the Reverence due to that blessed Spirit; since the Sin against him is so peculiarly heinous; that therefore we receive his Illuminations with meek and willing Minds; and follow his Suggestions with Cheerfulness and Zeal; above all, that we disengage from every Impediment which may clog our Duty, and indispose us for the Reception of his divine Instructions. A Temple (we know) befits him; but it must be somewhat like himself, and the Place of his more peculiar Residence all holy and heavenly. We must therefore concur with him, in fitting and preparing such a Temple for him, in purging our Souls  
and



Bodies from all the impure Remains of our vicious Passions; in *casting down Imaginations, and every high Thing which exalteth it self against the Knowledge of God*; and finally in subduing all our Powers to his Obedience. Thus if we work together with him, we shall feel and enjoy the blessed Effects of our well meant Labour; *here* in the genuine Fruits of the Spirit, which are the several Graces and Ornaments of the Gospel; and *hereafter* in the Recompence which will attend them; in the Love and Enjoyment of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to all Eternity.

*To whom be ascribed Glory, Honour and Praise, Might, Majesty and Dominion now and ever.*

*The End of the First VOLUME.*

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Instructions. A Temple (we  
know) at Jerusalem, which  
was his to dwell in, and the Place of his  
regular Residence all holy and  
good men are to follow him. We

The End of the First Volume.

